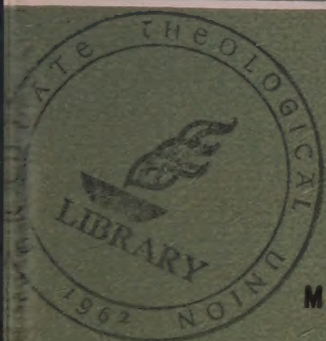


TEEVADHARA

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MYSTICAL PRAYER

REJOICING IN THE LORD

K. Luke

MYSTICAL PRAYER AS
DIVINE-HUMAN INTERSUBJECTIVITY

Felix Podimattam

RENEWAL OF MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

Felix Podimattam

BOOK REVIEW

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JEEVADHARA

The Fullness of Life

MYSTICAL PRAYER

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Felix Podimattam

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Kerala, India

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Editorial

We hope that nobody will be taken aback by the title of this issue of *Jeevadhara*. What on earth, some might ask, have we to do with this business of mystical prayer, we who are tossing and tumbling within a strenuous and tormented life with hardly any time even for a few dull and distracted prayers!

We hasten to say that we are interested primarily in Jesus Christ and words like mystical prayer, in the last analysis, mean nothing to us except Christ's life in us insofar as we do not put any obstacle to its functioning. We have only one vocation, namely, the vocation to holiness which consists in allowing the life of Christ to flower and fructify in us. And this vocation is not the monopoly of a few chosen souls in the Church.

It is a pity that even among those who have been trained to cultivate personal attitudes to God, there are many who are satisfied with meditative prayer for years on end. They sometimes flatter themselves into thinking that they are undeserving of higher awards of prayer and that this keeps them humble. But such an attitude is the outcome of a lazy unwillingness to shift from a familiar environment to unknown domains. The value of experiential prayer is such that we have no other alternative than to plunge into unfamiliar spiritual territories. The next steps are nothing but ways that lead us to a face-to-face encounter with God in ourselves.

We need a solid theology of mystical prayer that is relevant to our times. An influential section of the past mystical theology has given the impression that mystical prayer is reserved for a select few who are considered to be the first class citizens of the kingdom. This theological trend is indeed baffling. If God is our loving Father and we are His dear children, how can He be satisfied with the half-hearted love of most of us? Which earthly father would be content with such a love from most of his children?

Prayer is much more than an act posited out of duty or telling God about our needs. It is true that frequently Christians do not rise above this level of prayer. Yet many of them realize that their prayer should be something more. They vaguely sense that there is somewhere in their being a concealed treasure to be dug up, a hidden seed ready to germinate and fructify if only they had the will to nurture it. Although this work involves a lot of hard labour, it is pregnant with life and joy and should we not give a try to it?

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Felix Podimattam

Rejoicing in the Lord

Experiencing an ineffable, all-absorbing, ecstatic joy in God was the very essence of public worship in ancient Israel, and that is why there are so many references to rejoicing in the Psalms. When the invitation is addressed to the worshippers in the temple, "Shout for joy before the Lord" (33:1), what is demanded is simply to give out a ringing cry of joy, which is just the opposite of the plaintive cry a person who is in distress will invariably utter. Such gestures as clapping of hands, shouting and dancing are all indicative of the unbounded joy the people of Israel were wont to experience in the presence of their God, and the Hebrew language whose poverty of words is proverbial, does possess a fairly rich variety of roots that in some way or other convey the idea of rejoicing. Finding joy in God was, then, an integral part of the piety of the psalmists, and we can gain a comprehensive view of this fact of their piety by examining the more important words they employ while describing their sentiments during cult.

A. *Simhāh*, *sāmah*, "joy, to rejoice"

The verb *sāmah*, occurring 154 times in its various forms in the poetical as well as prose sections of the OT, is stative, i. e., indicative of a state or condition, and therefore means "to be joyous", and derivatively, "to rejoice"; the root is found in Ugaritic¹, Accadian², and Arabic.³ There is in Hebrew the

1. Compare, "In your life, O our father, would we rejoice" (125:14:99); "Let Asherah and her sons rejoice" (49:1:11); in the following passage the noun form joy occurs in parallelism with laughter: "With laughter her heart is full, with joy the liver of Anath" (Anath II: 26).

2. The meaning is "to flourish, be impressive, imposing" (said of trees, vegetation, kingdom, etc.).

3. Several meanings are attested: "to be high, tall; to be arrogant, haughty; to disdain", etc.

idiomatic expression "to rejoice before the face⁴ of Yahweh" (Dt. 12: 7, 12, 18 etc.); not only the pious man but also his son and daughter, male and female slave, the Levite, the alien, the orphan and the widow have to make merry in the divine presence (Dt. 16: 11). Another expression is "to rejoice in Yahweh" (Joel 2: 23; Ps. 32: 11; 40: 17 etc.), and in both the phrases the stem that is used is the simple one. The intensive stem occurs in passages where there is question of causing someone to rejoice, of gladdening someone, and once we meet with the causative stem as well (Ps. 89: 43). The OZ attests too the substantive *šimhāh* (93 times), "joy, mirth, gladness", and the adjective *šāmeah*, "joyful, glad", which is not in any way different from the simple participle.⁵

Rejoicing involves taking pleasure in life and in its experiences (Dt. 33: 18; Jdg. 9: 19 etc.), and we can have a concrete idea of it from Is. 22: 13 where *šimhāh* and *šāšōn* (to be discussed below) are vividly described: the inhabitants of Jerusalem slaughter cattle and sheep, eat meat and drink wine, and enjoy themselves to the full. Another account of rejoicing survives in Is. 65: 13f., a passage which makes a contrast between the bliss of the righteous and the misery of the wicked: the just will be eating and drinking and shouting for joy⁶; thus will they be rejoicing, while the impious will be looking on in con-

4. The role the divine face used to play in the piety of ancient Israel is discussed in the present writer's book *The Piety of the Psalms* (to appear in 1980).

5. Stative verbs in Hebrew, strictly speaking, do not have a proper participial form, its place being taken by the verbal adjective.

6. In the original *miṭṭāb lēb*, where the first word represents the sandhi form of the preposition *min*, "from", plus the nominal element *ṭāb*, literally, "goodness, good things, goods"; there is too the expression *ṭōb lēb* (where the first word can be understood as a verb or adjective), "to be glad, joyful", and "merry, glad heart". On *lēb* "heart", cf. Luke, *Israel before Yahweh* (Pontifical Institute Publications 32, Alwaye, 1978) p. 27.

fusion and shame.⁷ Rejoicing, then, goes hand in hand with feasting (Est. 9: 17f, 19, 22), and is coupled with ringing cries, shouts, etc. which can be heard in the streets (Jer. 7: 34; 16: 9 etc.), and clapping of hands (2 Kg. 11: 14). We must not fail to note here that according to the OT there is also an arrogant type of rejoicing (Is. 14: 8; Ps. 35: 15 etc.), and finally the farmer's joy at the time of harvest was part of the poet's imagery in ancient Israel (Is. 9: 2; Ps. 126: 6).

In the Psalter the verbal root is employed much more frequently than the substantive, and its subject can be God or man; the Lord is said to rejoice in his works (104: 3), and also to gladden the pious man's foes (89: 43). At times reference is made to the rejoicing of the psalmist's enemies, something which Yahweh is most earnestly requested to prevent (30: 2; 35: 15, 19, 24; 38: 17). The invitation to rejoice is addressed to heaven and earth (96: 11; 97: 1), and even to the gentile nations (67: 5); Zion and Israel are prepresented as rejoicing in the Lord (14: 7; 48: 12; 53: 7; 97: 8; 149: 2), but we are here concerned with the pious men as well as of the community as such, when they take part in the temple cult. From our survey of the tradition of *simhāh* it should be clear that a word which originally denoted eating, drinking and merry-making (cf. 104: 15), was spiritualized and then transferred to the sphere of the believer's life of fellowship with God.

The community, after recalling to mind the wonder of the crossing of the sea, exclaims: "Let us rejoice in him" (66: 6); from this it follows that rejoicing in ancient Israel was necessarily bound up with the experience of God's saving actions in history. A salvific intervention on behalf of private persons too may make the community rejoice (118: 24), and groups, when in distress, may pray for the grace to rejoice all the days of their life (90: 14). As recompense for the days when God inflicted sufferings on his people, or perhaps for as many days as they had to face sufferings, he should make them glad (90: 15). In

7. That is, they will suffer loss of face, which is the greatest evil an oriental can ever think of; for details, cf. Luke, "Imprecations in the Psalms; their Positive Value", *Jeevadhara* (1972) passim.

God who is the believer's help and shield, "our hearts rejoice" (33: 21). The kings of Israel too, as they returned victorious from the field of battle, used to rejoice greatly in the Lord (21: 2; cf. 63: 12).

When God delivers a believer from distress, he invariably experiences gladness (31: 8), and while caught up in the meshes of suffering, a prayer that he invariably uttered was, "Gladden the soul of your servant" (86: 4), evidently, by saving him from his tragic plight; once this is done, he will not only sing songs of praise to the Lord's name but also be glad in him (9: 3); he will exclaim: "You make me glad, O Lord, by your deeds" (92: 5). Joy in God can be experienced on other occasions as well: thus the author of Ps. 104, after eliciting the wish that his poetical creation may win Yahweh's favour, adds: "I will be glad in the Lord" (v. 34). Special mention must be made of 122: 1 where a psalmist who had perhaps for the first time been to Jerusalem and is about to return home, recalls to mind the gladness he experienced when he heard the announcement regarding the pilgrimage to the holy city: "I rejoiced when they said to me, 'We will go up to the house of the Lord'." ⁸

The righteous are often invited to rejoice in the Lord (33: 11; 64: 11; 68: 4; 97: 12; 107: 42), and so too those who seek God (40: 17, 705), those who favour the psalmist's cause (35: 27), those who trust in God (5: 12; 105: 13), and especially the poor (34: 3; 69: 33). We take it for granted that the poor of the Psalms are individuals belonging to the lower strata of society who are being exploited and persecuted by their better-off fellowmen, and who, being without human resources, turn to God for help; the view that they formed some sort of spiritual fraternity seems unlikely. ⁹ The righteous, no matter by what name they are called, are the ones who rejoice in God by taking part in the temple cult, and by carrying out his will in their regard (19: 9), and the awareness that God is on their

8. Details on pilgrimages in the book referred to in n. 4.

9. For this view, cf. A. Gelin, *The Poor of Yahweh* (Collegeville, 1964); criticism in S. Mowinkel, *The Psalms in the Worship of Israel II* (Oxford, 1962) p. 251 (Note XXIX).

side makes them glad when they happen to be cursed by their bitter foes (109: 28).

58:11 calls for some special comment, since it preserves a statement that is apparently quite harsh; here is the full text of the verse:

"The just man shall be glad when he sees vengeance;
he shall bathe his feet in the blood of the wicked."¹⁰

The meaning of the first stichos will become clear only when we understand the exact nature of the vengeance the author has in mind. The word in the original, *nāqām*, though certainly it can stand for human vengeance, generally means God's punitive intervention in history, the punishment he inflicts on the sinner, which in the final analysis signifies God's victory over sin. The author of Ps. 58 is, thus, stating that the righteous man will rejoice when he sees God emerging thus victor over whatever is opposed to his salvific designs. For all practical purposes the psalmist's words have the same purport as the petition, "Your kingdom come", in the Lord's prayer.

The second line makes the average believer shudder with horror! To understand properly the psalmist's words, we must remember that the people of the Orient were (and still are) in the habit of using exaggerated forms of speech, and in the utterance under consideration we have an instance of it. Furthermore the poets in ancient Israel were wont to reproduce almost verbatim the literary expressions and motifs occurring in the poetry of Canaan, and 58:11 (cf. too 68:24) is something literally taken over from Ugaritic poetry: the goddess Anath, who is associated with both war and love, is said to have washed her hands in the blood of slain soldiers and her fingers in the gore of troops (Anath II:34f.).¹¹ To take formulaic locutions such as the one occurring in 58:11 in the exact literal sense would be as absurd as our understanding in the strict

10. The Septuagint has the reading *tas cheiras autoû*, "his hands", which presupposes a Hebrew original with *kappāw*, in place of the current reading *dē'āmāw*.

11. Details in H. Gese et alii, *Die Religiouen Altsyriens, Altarabiens und der Mandäer* (Die Religionen der Menschheit 10/2, Stuttgart, 1970) pp. 156-61.

sense an irate mother's words to her only child. "You deserve to be hanged!"

We have so far been examining passages which employ some finite form or other of the verbal root *šāmah*, and it must now be added that the substantive too occurs a few times in the Psalter. The Israelites recall how when they were in Babylon their captors urged them to show *šimhāh*, "gladness", a demand that caused them extreme pain (137:3). Generally, however, the word has to do with the joy the pious man experiences in his life of fellowship with Yahweh: compare the expressions, "to hear the sounds of *šāšōn* and *šimhāh*" (51:10), "to rejoice in *šimhāh*" (68:4), and "to serve the Lord in *šimhah*" (100:2). To the upright of heart belongs gladness (97:11), and God himself, by granting victory to the kings of Israel, causes them to exult in gladness (21:7). Poets address Yahweh as the God of their joy (43:4), and proclaim aloud that he puts gladness into their hearts (4:3), fills them with joy in his presence (16:11), and clothes them with gladness (30:12). What all these utterances point to is an ineffable experience of joy on the part of believers in ancient Israel when they became sharers in God's gift of salvation, or were taking part in the solemn cult in the temple.

B. *Šāšōn*, *šūš*, "joy, to rejoice"

The verb *šūš*, "to rejoice, exult", occurring 27 times in the Hebrew Bible, is onomatopoeic in origin and exclusively poetical, and the substantive *šāšōn*, which too is exclusively poetical, is a descriptive formation meaning "exultation, rejoicing". The verb is used in parallelism with such synonyms as *gīl* (discussed below), *šāmah* and *ʾālaš* (discussed below), and as for the substantive it is coupled with *šimhāh* (Jer. 7:34, 16:9, 25:10 etc.) and *rhillāh*, "praise" (Jer. 33:9).¹² In ancient Israel guests used to be anointed (Ps. 23:5), and the special oil used for the anointing of monarchs was known as the oil of *šāšōn* (Ps. 45:8).¹³ The nature of the rejoicing signified by the present

12. The present term is a derivative of the root *hālāl* (discussed in the work mentioned in n. 4).

13. Cf. too Is. 61:3, where the present expression is used: the prophet is despatched by God to give the people dwelling in Zion "the oil of gladness in place of mourning."

stem may be gathered from Is. 24:7-9,11. a passage occurring in a very late apocalyptic compilation: the text mentions wine, cheerful timbrels and harps,¹⁴ shouting, etc., whence it is clear that in its secular use *šûš* stood for merry-making accompanied by eating, drinking and singing (cf. Is. 22:13). We should also note that it designates the feeling of happiness of the bridegroom (Is. 62:5) and of the athlete who runs his course (Ps. 19:6), and the transfer of a root with so many nuances to the religious sphere is easily understandable.

When in distress the believer will pray that his soul be granted the favour to rejoice in Yahweh's salvation (35:9), and all those who seek God will be able to rejoice and be glad in him (40:17. 705). 68:4 combines the present verb with *šimhāh*, combination whose force cannot be brought out in English. God should make the psalmist hear *šāšôn* and *šimhāh*, i.e., loud shouting as expression of happiness, by bringing about his recovery (51:10); the sufferer prays for the experience of joy as a result of his sharing in God's gift of salvation (51:14), and it is said that at the time of deliverance from Egypt the Lord made his people go forth in *šāšôn* (105:43).

The *tôrāh*, "law", as the embodiment of God's salvific will vis-à-vis the people he had chosen as his own, is a source of joy for the psalmist's heart (119:111): walking in the way of the law gives joy to him (119:14), so that he rightly exclaims: "I am *šāš*¹⁵ over your words" (119:162). Reference must finally be made here to the noun form *māšôs*, occurring just once in the Psalter: Zion is a cause of joy for all the earth (48:3).

In conclusion, *šûš* and *šāšôn* describe the ineffable joy the community of God's people, or the individual believer, experiences when they are engaged in cult or when they have been granted some special favour from on high, and the tradition of the OT bears out the fact that it used to be externally expressed

14. In the original *m'sôs tuppîm* and *m'sôs kinnôr*, the first word in the two phrases being the genitival form of *māšôs*, a substantive created from the root under study and occurring once in the Psalter (48:3).

15. This is the participle of *šûš*.

through loud and boisterous singing to the accompaniment of musical instruments; dancing, clapping of hands, and similar gestures could very well serve as expressions of *šāšōn*.

C. *Gīl*, "to rejoice, exult"

The verbal root here cited, occurring 45 times in the OT, and found also in Ugaritic,¹⁶ has been connected with Arabic *jāla*,¹⁷ "to go turn round, dance in ecstasy", etc. Another Arabic base that has been adduced as cognate is *jalala*, "to be high, exalted", and theoretically speaking, the nuance "to rejoice", can easily develop from the root's meanings. In any case *gīl* is onomatopoeic in origin, inspired in all likelihood by sounds heard in nature,¹⁸ and from this verbal base are formed two substantive, *gīl* and *gīlāh* (both together 10 times), which, however, are not of much moment for our study.

An exclusively poetical expression, *gīl* occurs in parallelism not only with *šāš* and *šāmāh* but also with *rānan* and *ālaz* (discussed below). The type of rejoicing it signifies is essentially the religious one, arising from the experience of salvation; compare the following words from an apocalyptic hymn:

"Behold our God to whom we looked to save us...
Let us rejoice and be glad that he has saved us"
(Is. 25: 9).

When Israel is delivered from exile in Babylon, she will rejoice in Yahweh (Is. 41: 16); she now rejoices heartily because she has been clothed with the robe of salvation (Is 61: 10). That *gīl* could be accompanied by eating, drinking, loud singing and similar gestures is obvious, and that it was a feature of the wedding day is clear from the Psalter (45: 16).

According to the tradition of the Psalms, the pious man who, after having been delivered from distress, has come to the

16. References in J. Aistleitner, *Wörterbuch der ugaritischen Sprache* (Berichte über die Verhandlungen der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, philol. - hist. Kl. 106/3, 2nd ed., Berlin, 1965) p. 65.

17. Be it noted that to Hebrew *g* there corresponds in Arabic *j*.

18. On this point, cf. J. Botterweck, *Der Trilateralismus im Semitischen* (Bonner Biblische Beiträge 3, Bonn, 1952).

temple, rejoices in God's salvation, and this action of rejoicing takes place "at the gates of the daughter of Zion" (9: 15).¹⁹ When encompassed by suffering and pain, the believer will pray to God saying that he will rejoice when he, the Lord, has taken note of his affliction (31:8), and after experiencing God's salvific intervention on his behalf, he may also exhort the worshippers present in the temple to be glad, to rejoice, and to give out ringing cries of joy (32:11). A prayer uttered by a sick man runs thus: "Let my heart rejoice in your salvation" (13:6); another prayer, stemming from the heart of a man who is distressed beyond measure at the prevalence of ungodliness in the land, is not less significant: "Oh, that out of Zion shall come the salvation of Israel... Then shall Jacob rejoice" (14:7, 53:7). 51:10, a passage already cited twice, speaks of the rejoicing of the psalmist's bones which have been crushed by Yahweh, of course, through the infirmity he has himself brought upon him. The king who has been able to rout his foes rejoices greatly in the victory God has granted him (21:2).

The Israelite who is permeated with profound feelings of trust in Yahweh will naturally have experience of his soul's²⁰ incessant rejoicing (16:9); the author of Ps. 35, as a matter of fact, says: "My soul rejoices in the Lord and is glad in his salvation" (v. 9). On the other hand there is the possibility that the poet's foes may rejoice as they see him stumbling and falling, a tragedy that must be prevented: "Let not my foes rejoice over my downfall" (13:5). As for the psalmist's friends, they will, on the day when the ceremony of thanksgiving takes place, exclaim: "This is the day the Lord has made; let us be glad... in it" (118: 24). Not only the people of Israel but also Zion (97:8) and the cities of the land rejoice on experiencing

19. In the ancient world the temple gates had an important part to play in public worship; for the Mesopotamian tradition, cf. H.-J. Kraus, *Psalmen* II (Biblischer Kommentar 15, Neukirchen, 1960) p. 807.

20. In the original *kebôdî* "my glory" (cf. Ps. 7: 6), but some manuscripts have *kebêdî*, "my liver" (or soul; on the connection between the liver and rejoicing, cf. n. 1 above); the Septuagint has *hê glosse moû*, "my tongue", which presupposes a Hebrew text with *lêsonî*.

God's salvation (48:12; the cities of Zion are in a special way exhorted to rejoice in their king (149:2).

Material creation is at times invited to engage in the *gil*-activity, especially when Yahweh makes his appearance as king: "Let the earth rejoice" (96:11; 91): the whole of visible creation becomes, then, a worshipping assembly of gigantic proportions and rejoices in Yahweh the king. Interesting to note, the Lord, by granting rain, clothes the hills with rejoicing (65:13)—a statement that has doubtless been inspired by the custom of the mourner's putting his sackcloth and donning on festal garments as soon as he is delivered from distress (30:12).

89:16f. must be cited here inasmuch as it is a most forceful account of what the people of Israel regarded as the ideal state of affairs, formulated with the help of the verb *gil*:

"Happy the people who know *t-rû'āh*...

At your name *y-gîlûn* (they rejoice) all the day."

The Hebrew word in the first line denotes a joyful shout, particularly at the time of cult, when the believer is internally moved by an all pervading feeling of happiness.²¹ 43:4 is no less impressive:

"Then I will go to the altar of God,
The God of my *šimhāh* and *gîl*."

The meaning of the second stichos is, "The God who is the source of my gladness and exultation".²²

D. *Alas, ālaz*, "to exult, rejoice"

These two roots, usually rendered, "to exult, rejoice, be jubilant", seems to be of onomatopoeic origin, and even as the non Semitist can perceive without any difficulty, they are closely related, the second being but a later variant of the first; another variant belonging here is '*alas*, "to taste, enjoy", which, however, is not part of the vocabulary of the Psalms. '*ālay* occurs too

21. Detailed discussion of this gesture in the book mentioned in n. 4.

22. Cf. the Vulgate rendering, "ad Deum laetitiae exultationis meae."

in Accadian, and is associated with *libbu*, "heart", *šurru*, id., and *kabattu*, "liver", all of which are said to rejoice.²³

We shall begin our discussion with *'alaz* which attests also the adjectival forms *'allîz* and *ālêz*, "exultant, jubilant",²⁴ but these are not used in the Psalms. Our verb has as its parallel *šamah*, *gîl*, etc., and on examining Psalter we find that it occurs once in a divine oracle with Yahweh as the subject (60:8 = 108:8),²⁵ but otherwise it is used of men and their activity of rejoicing, and we are also told that the wicked exult in their impiety (94:3). As is only normal, pious folk who know from personal experience that God is their strength and protection, proclaim aloud that their heart rejoices in him (28:7). 68:5, where the worshippers are exhorted to exult before Yahweh, the rider of the clouds,²⁶ is quite significant, inasmuch as *'alaz* occurs along with the verbs "to sing", "to chant praise", and to "extolt", and "to extol". Besides the faithful (149:5), the trees of the forest too are invited to exult before Yahweh as he makes his solemn appearance (96:12). Mute creation, then, rejoices in God in much the same way as his people rejoice in him when they become recipients of his favours.

As for *'ālaš*, it has as its subject the heart (1 Sam. 2:1), the fields and all that is in them (1 Chr. 16:32) and the cities which have in them the righteous who enjoy bliss (Prv. 11:10), and also celebrate their triumph (Prv. 28:12). The psalmists naturally exult in God, and while narrating this experience they employ our verb in parallelism with *šamah* and *zimmēr*, "to sing"; (9:3): those who love the divine name exult in the Lord (5:12), and the just are invariably invited to engage in activity: in fact, 68:4 attest the present verb along with *šamah* and *šûš*, this latter being followed by "in *šimhāh*". The wicked on their part

23. W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* I (Wiesbaden, 1965) p. 200. The reader should bear in mind that Accadian *libbu* corresponds to Hebrew *lēb*, "heart" (cf. n. 6).

24. The first expression has also the meaning "wanton, presumptuous" (cf. L. Koehler-W. Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* [Leiden, 1954] p. 708).

25. Luke, *Israel before Yahweh*, p. 80.

26. M. Dahood, *Psalms* II (The Anchor Bible, New York, 1968) p. 136.

exult over the misfortune of their neighbours, which is something that God is earnestly requested to prevent (25:2).

E. *Rinnāh*, *rānau* "ringing cry, give out a ringing cry"

The verb *rānan*, occurring 55 times in the OT, means "to give out a ringing cry, to ring out a cry of joy", and it is used in parallelism with all the verbs we have seen. It implies, then, an overwhelming feeling of exultation, euphoria, joy, etc. and its external expression by means of a ringing cry. It should also be recalled here that the present root's intensive stem is used with predilection by the psalmists, the sense being "to give out a ringing cry in an excess of joy". The causative stem, though rarely, is employed by the poets, the meaning in this case being "to cause to emit a cry of joy" (Ps. 32:11; 65:9; 81:2). The substantive *rinnāh* (32 times) has the meaning "exultation, ringing cry", which is the opposite of the cry of distress and pain.

The activity of emitting ringing cries of joy is predicated of the mountains Tabor and Hermon (89:13), the trees of the forest (96:12), all the earth (98:4), and the mountains at large (98:8). The pious (149:5), the gentiles (67:5), and generations after generations of believers (145:7) exult in Yahweh and his salvific activities. The element of unbounded joy that characterized the psalmists' cries of jubilation comes to the fore in 32:11 where, to the righteous, are addressed the invitations *šinhû*, "rejoice", *gîlû*, "be glad", and *harninnû*²⁷ "exult". Exulting in God took place to the accompaniment of such musical instruments as the harp, the ten-stringed lyre (33:1f; 71:22f.), the timbrel (81:2f.), loud singing (33:3) and religious shout (81:2). The believer's *rānan*-activity is therefore, inseparable from other positive expressions of joy.

The possibility of exulting comes ultimately from God, who makes even the east and the west resound with joy (65:9), rings the psalmist round with cries of freedom (32:7), and clothes his chosen ones with joy (132:9, 16). A pious man whose life has been preserved from death says: "My lips shall shout for joy" (71:23); another who has put his trust in the

27. This is the causative form of *rānan*.

Lord remarks: "In the shadow of your wings I shout for joy" (63: 8); all those who trust in him shall exult for ever (5: 12). The works of his hands make the pious exult (92: 5); thus when he grants victory to their king the people of Israel exult in him (20: 6), and when any individual happens to be delivered from distress, his tongue will exult in Yahweh's righteousness (51:6).²⁸ There are more texts in this vein, an examination of which need not be attempted here, and it now remains for us to survey some of the texts where there occurs the noun form *rinnāh*.

An anonymous poet recalls with nostalgia the times when he used to lead festal crowds amid *qōl rinnāh* (42: 4), "cries of jubilation", to the sanctuary, and another poet on his part invites the believers to make the customary religious shout *qōl rinnāh* (47: 2), "to the sound of ringing cries". Those who have been recipients of favours from Yahweh recount his deeds with cries of joy (107: 22), and recall how he has delivered his people in *šāšōn* and *rinnāh* (105: 43); the friends of the man who has been saved from trouble proclaim aloud on the day of thanksgiving how *qōl rinnāh* is heard in the abodes of the righteous (118: 15). A suppliant who has suddenly been cured of his ailments observes that weeping in the evening is followed by *rinnāh* in the morning (30: 6).

F. Joy the most salient feature of Israel's religious life

In addition to the terms so far discussed, there are a few more roots which in their own way convey the idea of finding joy in God and in his salvific activities, but they cannot all be discussed in this short study. The discussions so far should serve to exercise some false notions about the religion and worship of the people of Israel current among unenlightened Christians: it is, for instance, taken for granted by many a sincere and pious Christian that the worship of God in the OT was characterized by fear and trembling, anxiety and anguish in the presence of Yahweh who punishes sin with the utmost severity. As against

28. Righteousness (or justice, as the Catholic versions have it) means God's salvific activity on behalf of the individual or the community.

this, there is in the NT, it is held, the possibility of approaching God with filial confidence and love, without fear of punishment. Well, this way of looking at things is inspired by unconscious anti-Jewish prejudice and ignorance of the religious traditions of ancient Israel; for the careful reader of the OT the most salient feature of the religious life of the people of Israel was joy in Yahweh.

While in moments of woe the Israelite believer yearned for the joy of salvation, in times of weal he enjoyed to the full God's gracious gifts. The supreme principle that governed the life of the chosen nation can be most adequately defined with the following words of the Apostle Paul: "Rejoice in the Lord always! I say it again: rejoice" (Phil. 4: 4).

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K. Luke

Mystical Prayer as Divine-Human Intersubjectivity

A. Mystical prayer as divine-human inter-presence

1. Theoretical reflection

1) In prayer we respond consciously to God's solicitous presence. The idea of presence looks to us simple like every other basic experience, till we attempt to describe it. In the galaxy in which we live, things and persons are present to us in various ways. They range from the simple way in which all things are present to one another in the eco-system to the complex personal presence which implies knowledge and love.

Fundamentally, to be present means to be there. We may distinguish two ways of being there. The first is related to being near. This mode of presence answers the question "where." It can be called spatial presence and is related to a specific position. The second kind of presence is concerned with being with, being for and being in. This is what we mean by personal presence. It provides answer to questions such as with whom?, in whom?, for whom? Here there is the placing of oneself in relation to another person by means of conscious acts of knowledge and love. It is not merely a question of being located in a position.

We shall pursue further this distinction between spatial and personal presence. Spatial presence is determined by the application of a unit of measurement and we indicate it by such words as near, absent, distinct, etc. When we employ the same words to personal presence, the unit of measurement is quality rather than quantity and is manifested through awareness, care, concern, love, sympathy, etc. In the case of personal presence, absence and distance are caused by lack of love and concern rather than by material distance.

Further, difference in spatial presence depends only on the degree of nearness. On the contrary, personal presence differs according as there are various ways of being with, being in and being for another. Thus a mother's presence to her children differs from her presence to her husband.

Things which are only spatially present to each other lose their identity when they are identified. They are distinct only when they are distant. When they do not keep their distance they cease to exist as distinct realities. In contrast, in personal presence the more one becomes a being with another, the greater the sense of personal identity. Now we understand the gospel paradox that by losing himself a person finds himself. This is stated in a different way in the maxim of Teilhard de Chardin that authentic differentiation is brought about by genuine union.

There are different degrees of personal presence according as there are degrees of being with, being for and being in. Although personal presence is totally different from spatial presence, yet the former desires the latter. Personal presence is not complete until an individual's whole being is, as it were, exhausted in his being with, being in, and being for another. In this kind of presence one's entire conscious activity is taken up with being with another.

To be perfect, personal presence calls for mutuality. Personal presence is not complete unless another's 'yes' is assured. Every kind of personal presence calls for a specific kind of response: speaking calls for listening, giving requires receiving; attention invites recognition of the same, loving demands return of love.

All that we have said of personal presence applies to prayer. Prayer is man's answer to God's personal presence to him. There are as many kinds of divine presence as there are kinds of God's being with, being in and being for man. For example, there is the mediate presence of God through His creation and there is His immediate presence in us insofar as He is more interior to us than we are to ourselves. In this immediate presence nothing intervenes between God and ourselves.

The degrees of God's presence range from the unknown and vague to the manifestly Trinitarian. Mystics have always tried to respond adequately to God's presence. There is only one way in which God's being with, being in and being for man are fully realized in human history and that is through Christ who is Emmanuel - God with us. Hence we may say that there is no authentic experience of the presence of God which is not at least remotely related to Christ.

Christian prayer originates from the faith-consciousness of God's being with us, being in us, and being for us in Christ. The entire reality of Christian prayer represents a response to the different facets of God's desire to be with, to be in, and to be for man. Man's response to God's all-embracing presence is adoration. Gratitude is nothing else than man's response to the infinitely rich divine presence. In sorrow we acknowledge that God's absence from us is due to our rejection of His loving presence. In a way all our petitionary prayers are intercessions for God's presence insofar as they are requests for the advent of God's kingdom.

The characteristic mark of Christian prayer consists in the fact that it is a child's response to a Father's presence, helping him to utter "Abba, Father". Christian prayer, therefore, takes its origin from a special presence originating from the gift of the Spirit of Christ. This new presence which is the presence of the Risen Christ may be called paschal presence.

2) Contemplative life is nothing but a life led in the actual presence of God. By his very nature, man is already in the presence of God. Indeed, this is all the more true of the Christian who has been invited to share in the divine life. In virtue of his baptism he participates in the divine Sonship of Christ.

It is true that God is eternally present only to Himself. From the beginning He is for Himself and in Himself. Indeed, from all eternity, He enjoys the inexpressible happiness of His self-presence which is the presence of the Father to the Son and of the Son to the Father, and the mutual presence of both to the Holy Spirit.

This mysterious eternal presence of God to Himself is communicated through creation. Everything that exists, lives and thinks does so because it shares in God's being, life and self-awareness. The very presence of God to Himself is the source of all creatures. It is by sharing in the divine self-presence that man is conscious of himself and is constituted as a unique being with a personal vocation in time and in eternity.

Among all creatures, man alone is privileged to be conscious of the divine presence and to be invited to respond to it. He is called to be present to God as God is present to him, namely in the manner that the Son is present to the Father and the Father to the Son in the inter-Trinitarian life. Jesus has taught us that our intimacy with Him and with the Father through Him, is really patterned upon His own intimacy with the Father.¹

3) We call that person a contemplative who has a direct relationship with God at the centre of his heart. He has had an experience of the presence of the Spirit of Christ in himself. Thus contemplation is a perpetual openness to God.

4) Talking of prayer, we are immediately reminded of the concept of inter-presence. Inter-presence refers to a deep mutual relationship that transcends mere functional association such as exists between clerk and customer, lawyer and client. Inter-presence is evidently experienced, for instance, in the encounter of two intimate friends as they meet after being separated for many years. An intense longing precedes the encounter. As they meet, there comes into being a multi-levelled knowing and deep loving. They are two persons relating to each other as such. Divine human inter-presence is what we understand by mystical prayer. It is basically a human being in loving relation to God.

2. Practical application

1) We must accept the loving presence of God. A man who prays stands with his hands open to God. He is confident that God will show His presence in the nature around him, in the persons he encounters and in the situations he faces. He believes that the world contains within it the secret of God. He

1) *Jn* 10: 14-15; 17: 21-23

expects that this secret will be disclosed to him gradually. Prayer produces an openness wherein God is able to give Himself to man. God wishes to communicate Himself in love to man, His creature. He goes even to the point of begging for admission into the human heart.

However, this openness does not occur automatically. It comes as a result of our confession of our limitation, dependence, weakness and sinfulness. Whenever we pray, we declare that we depend on God and that we have not yet reached our destiny. Only when we are open to all the gifts that are destined for us, do we become true persons. Giving can easily degenerate into manipulation where the receiver becomes dependent on the giver. As givers we can become the masters of the situation insofar as we distribute our goods to those whom we wish.

Something else happens in accepting gifts from others. When we accept gifts, another is allowed to enter into our life. Perhaps the gospel challenge lies precisely in its appeal to accept a gift which the receiver cannot reciprocate. The gift we have all received is the life of God Himself, the Spirit who is poured out into us in Christ. A prayerful person is always prepared to receive this gift of God and allow it to blossom in himself and in others.

2) For a Christian, living in the presence of God should not have the appearance of a duty imposed on him by external law. Such a living should be for him as natural as breathing the surrounding air. It is his birthright to live in the divine presence. It is the profoundest longing of his nature and the natural manifestation of his love for God, his Father. Since the contemplative life is the realization of God's personal presence to us, it is meant for all and not reserved for those few individual who live in seclusion. Prayer and contemplation should be the very breath of every Christian.

3) Many people are plagued with the problem as to how to remain always in the presence of God. We may justly wonder whether such a problem is not the result of a wrong concept that many entertain about prayer. Most people seem to imagine that in order to be in the presence of God they have to stop

thinking about everything else except God and that they have to struggle to maintain the thought of God. They seem to forget that any image of God that we can form in our mind is far from the reality of God.

Our thoughts of God may be compared to the statues or pictures in our churches or houses. Neither a crucifix nor a picture of Our Lord is Christ Himself. Similarly images of saints cannot be identified with the saints they represent. Their main role is to hold the attention of the worshippers and to fill their minds with the thought of Christ or the saints.

The same may be said of the concepts and images of God we form during prayer. They are merely pointers to the reality they represent. They can never exhaust the reality of God which is far beyond the grasp of man. Thoughts and images never go beyond the level of signs. As soon as we try to identify them with the reality of God, they are converted into idols and mental idols are as dangerous as stone or metal idols. Though we need often to employ signs in our prayer we should do so with full freedom, always trying to go beyond them to the reality. From what we have said above, it should be clear that the presence of God to us and our presence to Him are not dependent on any particular mode of working of our mind or senses.

4) In prayer we focus our most personal attention on God. We must learn to know and love God in such a way that not only our wills are consonant with God's will but even our unconscious reactions assume the mark of His love. Thus prayer should pass from the state of an activity in our lives to an unending expression of loving relationship with God.

B. Mystical prayer as conforming to the plan of the Father

The prayer of Jesus implied the free and responsible acceptance of the will of the Father. To pray is to desire and will what God wills. Consequently, it is to ask for and receive all that He wills in our regard. Thus prayer is conforming ourselves to the plan of God as it was in the case of Jesus.

Basically, prayer consists in our total acceptance of God as well as of His demands. The first prayer in the New Testament is a prayer of acceptance: "Let it be done to me according to thy word." Praying is saying 'yes' to God.

This was the nature of the prayer of Christ from the beginning of His life to its end. Never did He seek to change His Father's plan. He changed Himself in order to conform to God's plan all through His life. When He taught His disciples to pray: "Your will be done", He was in fact basing on His own experience. The prayer of all Christians follows the same model. The Holy Spirit says in us: "Yes, Father", inviting us and making it possible for us to utter these words freely. In other words, to pray is to let God transform our life and that of others so that all of us together may be more imbued with His life and may experience more intensely our filial relationship to Him.

Prayer as conforming to the plan of the Father should not be misunderstood as meaning passivity, for prayer is not resignation to whatever happens, nor is it a sign of our inability to achieve or change things. It is in its essence an activity of self-conversion and at the same time an expression of this conversion in one's free and active decision to commit oneself to God's salvific plan.

Since we have first to put aside our own will to embrace the will of God, prayer implies a basic change in us of mind and heart. Our ways of thinking, conditioned as they are by the circumstances of our lives, should give place to the silent and intuitive teaching of the Holy Spirit and we must receive the mind of Christ. Prayer is thus conversion in the deep sense of the word, namely, changing our viewpoints on life and discarding all untested beliefs that we have hitherto taken for granted.

C. Mystical prayer as listening to God

1. Theoretical reflection

1) In prayer, primarily it is God who speaks and we should be listening. But we are generally inclined to emphasize our

activity in prayer. Throughout the time of prayer we engage ourselves in talking to God and we feel that unless we do so, there is some deficiency in our prayer. This is chiefly due to faulty notions of prayer created in us through our early training and through much of our own experience of praying. Most of us were taught from our early childhood to say prayers. Liturgical prayer-forms are made of a great deal of words, actions and postures. In meditative prayer stress is laid on the activity of concentrating on points and on driving away distractions. As a consequence, many people think that their prayer is a failure unless it includes a good dose of intense activity.

It will not be possible to develop a truly prayerful spirit until we outgrow such limited conceptions of prayer. Prayer is not to be regarded as a device for laying hold of God in order to gain control of our life. Rather it is a loving encounter with God in which we, standing before Him in total openness, allow ourselves to be touched and transformed by Him.

There is, of course, activity in prayer, including speaking with God. However, our prayer should not consist mainly of this. We should have quiet moments when we allow the Divine Physician to examine our souls in order to find out just where our problem lies and to flood them with His holy and healing Light.

2) God speaks first. It is only by His call and summons that man is enabled to speak. In prayer the initiative comes from God. The traditional definition of prayer as the elevation of mind and heart to God can be misleading if it fails to take into account that it is the initiative of God that makes prayer possible for man. What is essential, if prayer is to be authentic, is that God speaks first.

In prayer we have not to force God's attention. Rather, we have only to stir up our awareness that He is present to us and let His presence pervade our whole consciousness so that His plans for us may be realized in us. Our attention, then, is fixed on God and not on ourselves and gradually we cease to think of ourselves as praying and our whole existence is caught up in an attitude of prayerfulness.

Scripture presents to us a God who, by revealing Himself in history, communicates love to man rather than one who gives information about His various attributes. He is presented as one who yearns to be known and loved by us in a personal manner. But being more concerned with what He does, we often forget who God is. He is Love and His name is Emmanuel—God with us. He tells us: “I love you.”

3) All prayer is a response. We cannot talk to God unless He has first opened a dialogue with us. Our getting in touch with Him depends on His getting in touch with us first. Our invocation of Him follows His invitation to us. Our expression of gratitude to Him proceeds from His having given us something to thank for.

Prayer is more a hearing of God speaking to us than our being heard by Him; it is more a welcoming of God offering forgiveness to us than our offering of ourselves to God and asking His forgiveness. Prayer, in other words, consists in paying attention to God speaking to us and in allowing Him to unfold His plans for us.

It is God who makes the first move and plays the major part in prayer. The infinite chasm that separates man from God cannot be bridged by man but by God alone. God must come to man and this is what He did in the Incarnation of Jesus and continues to do in the life of those who pray.

Our effort, though necessary, is utterly incapable of encountering God. The notion of prayer as raising our minds and hearts to God, which seems to imply that prayer is largely a matter of our own efforts, a means to pull ourselves up to a God who is above, obviously smacks of Semi-pelagianism and is, therefore, unacceptable to the Christian. A better approach would be to see prayer as an opening of one's being to the God who comes down to man. This approach stresses the idea of receptivity or responsiveness to God. It also highlights the necessity of human effort in such a way that God remains the dominant partner.

Another way of approaching the same theme is to view prayer as letting Jesus come into our hearts. Here the idea

is clear that it is not our prayer that moves Jesus; rather it is the other way about. It is Jesus who moves us to pray. He knocks at the doors of our hearts and prayer is our response to this knocking: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and eat with him, and he with me."² As is clear from this passage, Jesus enters wherever He is not denied admittance, in order to eat with man. Common meal, in biblical language, is a symbol of intimate and joyous fellowship. Prayer, therefore, may be understood as a means of deep fellowship between God and man.

4) For contemplative prayer what is more important is the ear of the soul than the tongue. One should avoid the mistake of doing all the talking in prayer. Jesus warns us against it.³ One should not replace the words of Scripture: "Speak, Lord, Thy servant hears" with those of ours: "Listen, Lord, Thy servant speaks". God has many enlightening things to tell us. We must wait and listen to Him. Failure to do so would be tantamount to rushing into a doctor's consulting room, rattling off the symptoms of sickness and then running away before being diagnosed. Again it would be almost as if one were to ring God's doorbell and then dash away. It is necessary that we improve our ability to listen to God.

5) Contemplative prayer is a matter of being present before God and this involves deep listening. This listening is very similar to one's experience of listening to a friend where one listens more to the person than to his words. In such a listening there is always a discovery of the worth and dignity of the friend. The bond of love and friendship depends on the ability of friends to listen to each other and to be present to each other. Similarly, our ability to listen to God and to be present to Him is basic to prayer.

6) Contemplative prayer consists mainly in silence. Silence should not be taken to mean the dead quietness of total inactivity. Silence can be alive and meaningful and at times

2) Rev 3:20

3) Mt 6:7

even eloquent beyond speech. It holds reserves that can sometimes be spoilt by speech.

Silence can be indicative of respect as in the case of the silence of the guards at the house of a ruler or of the silence of the child in the company of adults at table. Silence can signify acceptance where talking would fail or would be untrue. We can bear a lot of suffering if we are not expected to talk about it. Silence is one of the best languages of love. Words are miserably inadequate to express the depth of our feelings. To try to pack into the narrow limits of words the full tide of our desires and yearnings is a vain attempt. When hearts are at one in love, speech is an interruption.

Applying this to the spiritual realm, we can say that silence is an admirable way of being related to God in prayer. It expresses the inexpressible; holds what words can never contain and communicates what we wish to tell the Infinite Beauty in a manner that human speech can never hope to master. In prayer, it is enough for the lover to be in this profoundly meaningful silence, with the Beloved whom eye has not seen nor ear heard of.

7) Prayer is waiting on God. On account of the onesided nature of our prayer habit, many of us have never begun to know God by waiting on Him. To wait upon God is not just to pass time doing nothing at all; but rather, it is to let God speak to us. In the Bible one comes across frequently these and similar expressions: "Our soul waiteth for the Lord",⁴ "I will wait on thy name",⁵ "My soul waiteth upon God",⁶ "These wait upon thee",⁷ "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength".⁸

There are many gospel references which make it abundantly clear that Jesus considered praying as related to watching. In many of His sayings, watching and praying are linked together. On several occasions Christ admonishes us to be constantly prepared for His coming so that we are not caught unawares in a state of surprise. His eschatological discourses contain the

4) *Ps* 33:20

5) *Ps* 52:9

6) *Ps* 62:1

7) *Ps* 104:27

8) *Is* 40:31

admonition to be alert. The prayer of watching is compared to the waiting of the bridesmaids for the bridegroom. Though entrusted with different tasks in the world, our primary duty is to wait for the Lord because He may come at any moment.

2. Practical application

1) Waiting is a painful experience. Accustomed as we are to speedy travel, quick cures and other time-saving benefits of modern science and technology, we want things to happen fast. It is difficult for us to wait. Impatience marks our character deeply and it is carried over even to our relationship with God and to our attitude towards prayer.

But the ability to wait, to spend time peacefully while growth occurs, is essential if our life is to be human and if we are to have meaningful relationship with God. Waiting is not sitting back and doing nothing. It is rather something positive and is an attitude towards life. It is realization that life, as also growth, is a slow process and that it is not a matter of pushing buttons. Such an attitude of waiting can gradually develop in us a deep respect for mystery. The mystery of friendship, for instance, takes time to develop. Precisely because it is a mystery, friendship cannot be forced into existence all of a sudden. A long process of waiting is inseparable from the growth of friendship. The same is true of our relationship with God; it too needs waiting.

To wait is to receive. We all like to be givers rather than receivers. Yet, life, love, freedom, joy, etc., are of the nature of gifts and are to be received. We become aware of this when we allow ourselves to receive these gifts from God. What we should do in prayer is just to wait in order to receive the abundant gifts that God has prepared for us.

2) We must listen to the revealed word of God. As God desires that we listen to Him, the privileged place in which we can do so, is obviously the Scriptures. What is most important for us is to be waiting for His communication and we will be surprised by the frequency with which He speaks directly and individually to us through them.

Reading the Scriptures should be an excellent means of listening to God with open heart. It would be good to develop the habit of selecting texts that touch our hearts. With such texts at our disposal, we will always find it easy to encounter God as speaking to us or to be with Him in deep and communicative silence.

3) God must be listened to in ourselves. It may be that the most neglected spot where we can listen to God is that which is closest to us, our own selves. Being formed in a unique manner by the creative finger of God and enriched by a life time of varied experiences, each one of us is a large world of unexpected mystery which hides the face of the God who longs to be discovered. As we are totally a gift of God's love, in listening to ourselves we come to recognize the gift that we are and begin to discover that the very core of our being yearns for a relationship with God as a response to His gratuitous love.

Being in touch with ourselves implies the exploration of a territory that is unknown and fearsome to us – the maze of our struggles and even animal-like drives. This will be a search for the meaning of our life as it is lived in response to God's call. It will mean also that we abandon all dreams of living an angelic life in order to be related to God and convince ourselves that for us to live in conscious relationship with God, is to live as a human being in a world of human existence and experience.

Listening to ourselves can also bring to light the beauty that God has placed in us as well as the hidden potentialities that we possess for good, love and service. The ultimate discovery of God can be made only in a deep encounter with God within ourselves, where the whole of reality, God, ourselves and the world merge into a joyful manifestation of the glory of God.

4) We have to listen to God in our brethren. As social beings we find that a great part of our life is made up of relatedness to others. We must strive to see that others are not just a cause for our annoyance or an opportunity for exercising philanthropy, though they may be all this occasionally. Rather, each person is a unique creation reflecting an aspect of God's

beauty and goodness. If our eyes are open enough to see reality as it is, we will notice that a great deal of good proceeds from others through their love and cheerful service. The words spoken by others can lead us to insights that we would never have been able to reach by ourselves. And more important still, there may be some persons who with their love, will share God's love to us experientially. They will become for us the greatest blessings of God on earth because we will find in them incarnated the goodness, love and tender care of the invisible God, whom we seek. They will make credible to us all the beautiful things that God has revealed to us about Himself.

5) Finally, we must listen to God in nature. Because of Jesus' incarnation, death and resurrection, the word has been freed from the limitations of time and space and is present not merely in the obviously holy or sacred areas of human existence but in the totality of man's life. God speaks to man in his ordinary circumstances at all times and in all places. He may be reading a newspaper or engaged in the humdrum activities of day-to-day life and yet he can pray provided he is prepared to respond to God's word in these experiences.

Christian tradition has always recognized this fact. Jesus Himself found that the simple things like vine, water, fire, seed, etc., could bear in themselves and proclaim silently many of His greatest teachings about God and His Kingdom. We have the famous example of St. Francis of Assisi who had been led to the highest mystical experience of the glory of God by the smallest things in nature.

We need to acquire a greater sensitivity to the word of God hidden in nature. When we have a listening spirit, any little contact with nature, be it a walk through the woods, or the watching of a flower, a stone, a leaf, or a stream, can be an excellent occasion of encountering God in prayer. Every human activity can be prayer provided it is the product of a listening responding to God. No human word is merely a human word, nor an event in history merely an historical event; they are, to a person who listens attentively, also vehicles of God's word.

D. Mystical prayer as speaking to God

1. Theoretical reflection

1) Prayer is a dialogue, a meeting between God and man. It is a bilateral action rather than a unilateral one. It is both God's word and man's word at the same time. It is a meeting of God and man in an address of love and response of love. What man says or does is an essential part of prayer because even God is unable to continue to speak to him if man does not speak. Even God cannot communicate with a person who is spiritually dead and silent. Prayer demands some initiative from man in spite of the fact that this initiative itself needs the support of divine grace.

2) Man has desired to be like God, since the dawn of the world. From the time he stretched his hands for the forbidden fruit of paradise, man tends to consider himself all-powerful, all-knowing and immortal. Modern man believes that he can perfect himself totally, at least in not too distant a future. He feels that he can grow into the highest species and even into a God!

But when we start seriously thinking about ourselves, we begin to slip from heights of pretension into depths of despair. We start trembling at the extent of our foolishness. After all, we are but little organisms whose passing life is compared by the psalmist to withering grass.

Still the desire to be like God endures. Probably this aspiration is not completely senseless nor is it entirely deceptive. We might be, like little pieces, going back to the magnetic mass of our origin to which we yearn to be rejoined. After all, man has been created as the image of God and he cannot expect to find rest until he meets his Maker.

So our feeling of kinship with God is not the effect of presumption. We may be compared to the sparks of the Eternal Fire. We are more than that. We are the children of the Father. Our hunger for God and our urge for union with Him is not

the fruit of vanity. We can encounter Him here now because He is our Father.

As He is our Father and we are His children, we may suppose that we sit before Him and chat with Him. Before the parents, children freely mutter and babble. Some of us may babble too much or too often. Our Father understands everything, even the unexpressed feelings and desires of those who are incapable of expressing them. When we have finished telling all about ourselves, we lovingly wait for His reply. This is prayer.

There can be a difficulty with regard to the understanding of prayer as speaking to God. We may interpret it as making a speech to God with the accompanying processes of thinking, logical flow of ideas and their verbal expression. We will be committing a serious error if we interpret thus because we would be attaching too much importance to the mind and its activities. Speaking to God would be better expressed if the word communication would replace the word speaking. A baby, for instance, starts communicating with its mother even before it is able to speak. It does so by its awareness of her presence. In the initial years, it is mainly through physical contact that the child has its awareness of its mother. The child and the mother make their contact through bodily touch and visual expressions. The sense of closeness or distance, of approval or disapproval is created through visual exchanges such as smiles, frowns, etc. Sometimes these feelings are communicated through sound. Until the child is about two years of age, both the speech of the mother and the babbling of the child are incomprehensible to each other. Yet the lack of verbal communication in no way affects the deep non-verbal intimacy between the mother and the child. For a proper understanding of prayer, a grasp of this non-verbal communication with another person is essential. A non-verbal intimate communication with God is at the heart of prayer.

3) Man experiences prayer as communication with God. We may ask what a pious unsophisticated person thinks when he prays, what his religious ideas and intellectual presuppositions are. Evidently, every devout person who prays believes that he

is talking to a God who is personally present to Him. when we analyze his prayer experience we find that he believes in a real personal God, in His immediate presence and in his own entering into a fellowship with this God who is present.

In prayer man turns to another Being and opens his heart to Him. This other with whom the praying person establishes relationship is no human being but the supreme Being on whom he is dependent. Yet this Being has all the features of a human being such as thought, will, feeling and self-awareness. The essential presupposition of prayer is the faith in the personality of God.

The praying person feels that he is close to this personal God. Primitive man believed that God had His abode in a specific place and he went to this place when he wanted to pray. If he could not go there, he would at least turn his eyes and hands in the direction of that place. The religiously mature man finds the divine presence in the depths of his own being. Once a praying person is present to God, he enters into an intimate converse, fellowship and communion with Him. This incomprehensible personal contact that takes place between the infinite God and the finite man is the marvel of prayer. This very fact makes it, more than a psychological event, a transcendental and metaphysical one. So prayer is to have communication with God and is comparable to the communication which a suppliant has with a judge, servant with master, child with father, bride with bridegroom.

4) Prayer is conversation with God as with an intimate friend. By speaking with people we come to know them. Conversation with God has a similar effect. The more frequently we converse with God, the better will be our knowledge of Him and the deeper our love for Him.

In Christian prayer what is most significant is the closeness of God's presence. The God with whom we speak is not an inaccessible God. He is close at hand is within ourselves. "Too late have I loved Thee! O Thou Beauty of ancient days, yet ever new! Too late have I loved Thee! And behold Thou wert

within me, and I abroad, and where I searched for Thee"⁹. We do not stand alone; we live in God, and He in us.¹⁰

2. Practical application

1) Prayer being a conversation, God has to be addressed in the second person: "Our Father.... hallowed be Thy name" etc. Therefore formulas of prayer in the third person are not real prayer at all. The "I believe in God", for example, is not a prayer, but a profession of one's faith because nobody is addressed: So in prayer, as we speak to God, the first thing to do is to put ourselves in His presence. By this action we are not evidently making God to be present to us because He is always present to us even when we don't think of Him. In our attempt to become conscious of God's presence we need not have to make an imaginative picture of God. We should rather have a deep conviction of His actual presence. We often forget this initial step to prayer. Sometimes our prayer is devoid of the knowledge of the one we are addressing. As a consequence, we get into curious combinations in prayer such as: Three *Our Fathers* to St. Joseph or St. Antony! The *Our Father* we can pray only to God the Father. In the *Hail Mary* we address Our Lady and nobody else.

2) We may ask the question as to whom to direct our prayer. There is no problem if we are using a text with a fixed form of prayer. The text itself will indicate to whom we have to address the prayer. In the case of informal prayer, we should address the person for whom we feel a special attraction. Thus allowing ourselves to be drawn by the attraction of our heart, we may direct our prayer generally to our Eucharistic Lord, if we are greatly devoted to him or to the Three Divine Persons if we are especially attracted to the mystery of the Blessed Trinity. In this regard we must have absolute freedom.

If one is not drawn naturally to any particular person as is usually the case with the beginners in spiritual life, it is advisable to have our Lord as the intimate friend to speak with. First of all, as St. Paul says, the heavenly Father and the Blessed

9) St. Augustine, *Confessions*, x, 27

10) *Jn* 15:4

Trinity dwell in light inaccessible. Beginners can contact them only after much effort. For them God is one who is afar off. On the contrary, Jesus is "the Son of Man" and so is one of us. From our childhood days we have developed a growing familiarity with Jesus. Secondly, the source of all supernatural life is Christ. He is vigorously active in each of us. As the Lord is specially interested in us, it is fitting that we make Him the centre of our prayer. Thirdly, it is, generally speaking, easier to make contact with the Father through Christ than directly. If we are with Christ we are also with the Father. If only we could be with Christ! Fourthly, we may add a psychological reason. We human beings, insofar as we are social, need companionship. We cannot live without companionship. One who has discovered Christ as the core of his love has found everything else and can dispense with a human partner.

Once we have discovered our rightful partner in prayer, we will do well to re-establish contact with the same person as we resume prayer. If the partner of our prayer is changed every now and then, we would run the risk of not establishing deep familiarity with any of them. The oftener we speak with the same person, the greater will our knowledge about him and our love for him be. Ultimately we all stand in need of a Divine Friend whether we have a human friend or not. God alone can satisfy us completely. So we need Him very much.

3) Human conversation is a spontaneous affair. It emerges from a particular situation and is coloured by its spontaneous features and expressions. Since prayer is a conversation, spontaneity should be its characteristic feature. It should be an overflow from within.

As life is variant, so should our prayer be. Reality can grow only if it undergoes change. We must offer our life to God as it is existentially lived at the moment. Both life and prayer should become an inseparable unit. As we pray, our hearts should be allowed to speak more than our minds.

In the beginning many words may be required in order to pray. As prayer deepens words become fewer and speech becomes

shorter. Eventually, one requires absolutely no words. Deep love is mute, A look or a gesture is sufficient; words become unnecessary.

4) Since prayer is communication with God, it should become a perpetual attitude rather than an occasional action. It should be a lasting companionship with God rather than a periodic request for His favours. The lives of great spiritual men and women testify to the fact that for them praying was a different matter from reciting prayers. They sought the Giver of gifts themselves. The greatest praying consists in a deep life-long communion with God, which often articulates itself in particular acts.

5) Many of our intellectual difficulties regarding prayer disappear when we conceive it as communication with God. Praying for various favours can raise baffling queries. Communing with God is the simplest, deepest and most intelligent prayer and it need not be disturbed by classical problems that usually plague petitionary prayer. When a man enjoys the companionship of his friend, the thought of begging for favours does not bother him. He is in possession of joy, peace, vision and inspiration proceeding from their mutual communion. When we conceive prayer as a transforming experience of divine communion beyond the sphere of begging, we can easily dismiss theoretical perplexities and intellectual difficulties about it. Prayer like friendship is simple as well as profound.

6) As a consequence of constant communication with God in prayer, God becomes a stark reality in one's life. God manifests Himself strikingly only to the one who prays. For many who have no dealings with God, He is just an abstract being. They have heard of Him in the home and in the church. But these voices about God are in their case comparable to the statements of astronomers regarding rings around the planet Saturn. Men believe in the existence of these rings without seeing them but this belief has absolutely no effect on their lives. Something similar happens in the lives of many people with regard to their belief in God.

Only those things with which we are experientially in contact, are real to us and influence our lives. Some people remark that they do not pray because God is not real to them. Probably the contrary would be more true, namely, that God is not real to them because they do not pray. Presupposing belief in God, prayer is a must for making His presence felt in one's life. The psalmist exclaimed: "O God, thou art *my* God"¹¹. It is not hard to say: "O God" as we stand afar off. But we should be making an interior search if we were to say: "O God, thou art *my* God." The former is a more theological assertion involving an opinion while the latter is a religious commitment embracing genuine experience. We can achieve the former by means of thought and remain unmoved. We reach the latter by prayer and we can never be the same as before.

Those who complain about the unreality of God in their lives should ask themselves if they have taken any measures to experience His presence. Human relationships become vigorous and significant when a sense of fellowship is renewed continuously by special re-unions. Friends become real to each other in this process. In the absence of such sharing no friendship can be maintained for long. When there is no communion with God in constant prayer, He becomes a cold hypothesis to explain the existence of the world.

7) Pondering over divine truths is not prayer unless a communication between God and man is established by means of it. Our meditation on the divine truths should carry a message to us from God and inspire us to admire, adore and thank Him. In prayer, insofar as God comes down to us, calling us by name and we respond to Him in love, not merely our thoughts are with God, but our entire selves in their totality.

E. Mystical prayer as intimacy with God

1. Theoretical reflection

1) The reality of prayer extends far beyond the concepts of listening to God and conversing with Him. Conversation is much

11) Ps 63:1

more than mere exchange of words; it is communication. Every speech is meant to lead to communion in love and life. Prayer is a communion with God where one receives God Himself into one's own heart. What God wants to communicate to one can never be contained in words; it has to be known at the depths of one's heart in an experience of the touch of God's lasting presence. Prayer in its full sense, is receiving a presence, a Person into one's heart.

2) To pray is to love. It is to get out of oneself in order to unite oneself to God in mind, heart and will. Prayer is not just being united with God on an ontological level as by virtue of the grace of the indwelling God. For, this union is not an active reality on our part even though it is always so on God's part. We are to activate it by prayer and it is in this sense that prayer is a raising of ourselves to God - the God who has already stooped down to us. In this it is immaterial whether we move our lips or not. It is love and union with God that matters. Prayer is an act of love that should be continuous.

Even in petitionary prayer there is an element of love in as much as it is the result of one's filial confidence in the heavenly Father. But this love is of a lower degree and needs to be perfected if prayer is to improve. There is a direct proportion between the quality of prayer and the quality of our love.

Love can exist in different degrees. There is an abyss separating the love of a simple woman, for instance, who recites a prayer before a statue for a favour and the love of St. Francis of Assisi who, while praying on La Verna only sought to have a share in the passion of Christ. The Progress from one step to another between these two extremes demands great efforts at purification of the heart and concentration of the mind. This is certainly something that lies beyond the possibilities of mere human achievement. But God's grace is powerful and active in us and to the degree that we correspond to it, it becomes more invading. Eventually, it will become dominant in every one of our actions, enkindling within our souls a furnace of love which will burn up every other interest.

The thoughts and desire of the person who has fallen in love with the divine Beauty will constantly ascend heavenwards and his soul will be drawn to a continuous embrace with God. As a consequence, it will be detached from the world. Full to overflowing, it will cry out: "I have found him whom my heart loves, and I shall never let him go." This experience of elan and repose in God is a sign of perfect prayer. From then on, the soul will be a mystical soul with prayer as a permanent act and habit.

3) In the words of Thomas Merton, contemplation is a loving knowledge of God. The most important element in the contemplative life is not knowledge but love. Contemplation flows from love and terminates in love. Contemplation consists in an experiential grasp of divine truth in a darkness that transcends the limits of conceptual knowledge. Such an experience can only be valid and true if it be born of divine love. Only love can establish the vital contact in which the will outstrips the dazzled intellect and touches as it were the very substance of the God whom our minds are unable to see.

Now here it must be well understood that love does not attain to some different object from the one presented to our understanding by the articles of faith or the revealed words of Scripture. Love is not a source of knowledge in the sense that it brings to the intelligence news of something it has never heard of in any way. However, in the loving knowledge of God which is obscure, love penetrates the conceptual content of revelation in order to know God experientially in a higher and more perfect mode than is possible to our intelligence. Intense supernatural love for God, directed by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit through His gifts, becomes a supra-conceptual means of knowing God as He is in Himself.

There are two kinds of loving knowledge. The soul feels in itself an intense love for God, reflects upon that love, and adds to this reflection the thought that it is also loved beyond measure by God Himself. Here love itself is the object of knowledge. It is our love that we contemplate; we rest and rejoice in the knowledge that we love and are loved. This is not, strictly speaking, mystical prayer.

Mystical prayer which produces a real supra-conceptual sense of the presence of God consists in something more than resting in the knowledge of our love. On the one hand, the soul moved by love, become the object of its own knowledge. On the other hand, the soul, touched and inflamed and transfigured by the illuminative flame of God's immediate presence, is no longer the object of knowledge but the actual medium in which God is known. Hence, God as He is in Himself is the object of the soul's contemplation. The medium in which He is seen is not charity considered as a habit or virtue, not the act of love reflected upon by the intelligence, but the soul itself burning and translucent in the flame of divine love. This divine love, which transfigures the soul and makes it the limpid medium in which God is known, is therefore remotely comparable to the Beatific Vision itself in which God's own divine light, filling and possessing and transforming the soul, takes the place of an idea or species in which the intelligence beholds Him.

To illustrate this distinction, Merton makes the following comparison. In the middle of the night, or on a rainy day, we can bring to mind the idea of a beautiful sunny afternoon and can re-create within ourselves the memory of sunshine, pleasure, warmth, flowers, trees, sky, clouds, and all the rest. As long as we reflect on them, these pictures and ideas are the objects of our knowledge. So too is it when we reflect upon the idea of God's love, and upon the experience of love present within us. If, however, the sun is shining outside and we look out of the window, without actually seeing the sun, we see its light everywhere in the sky. We know the sun in the atmosphere as in an actual medium.¹²

4) Contemplation is a communion or it is no coteemplation at all. Contemplation, first and foremost, is being in love which includes an appreciative gazing. Because the Father's love and presence fill the earth,¹³ asking us for our response, the whole earth is full of prayer. This is what makes prayer possible for us. For we cannot commune with a taskmaster; we can only

12) Thomas Merton, *The Ascent to Truth*, London, 1951, pp. 204-207

13) *Ps* 33:5

try to appease him. Neither can there be any communion with a mere prime mover. We can commune only with a lover. This makes it necessary that we first have a grasp of the creative love of the Father before we try to get the biblical feel for prayer.

The ancient Hebrew experienced God as goodness and perceived His love in everything He did.¹⁴ The biblical author, depict God as showing His loving kindness by forgiving sins, healing diseases, and bestowing tenderness.¹⁵ Psalm 147:3 pictures God as healing broken hearts. There are numerous other passages in the Bible that show God as deeply concerned about man.¹⁶

This love of God is creative and primal. The reason why we are to love God is that He first loved us¹⁷, gratuitously when we were still His enemies.¹⁸ He has given us the proof of this love in the passion of His Son.¹⁹ This love is not just a global concern for the whole of mankind but rather it is personal²⁰, for He fashions each individual in his mother's womb, observes everyone of his footsteps and counts every hair of his head.²¹

The Son of God likewise loves us individually. He calls His sheep by name²² and gives up His life as a sacrifice for each human person and so one might say with St. Paul that "He loved me and sacrificed Himself for my sake".²³

Love is the only response to love. It can take many forms such as that of a celebration or an affirmation of the fact that we are loved by the one who is the Lord of all.²⁴ But in prayer we often reduce our response to God's personal love for us into mere asking.

The basic premise of biblical prayer is that one should be utterly in love with God so that one loves Him not merely more than others but as *the* Beloved. It is this conviction that

14) *Ps* 145:13

16) *Ps* 94: 18; *Ps* 69:13

18) *Rom* 5:8

20) *Is* 43:1

22) *Jn* 10:3

24) *Ps* 89:1

15) *Ps* 103: 2-5

17) 1 *Jn* 4:19

19) *Jn* 3:16; 13:1; 1 *Jn* 4:10

21) *Ps* 139:13-14

23) *Gal* 2:20

is behind the oracles of Amos²⁵ and of Isaiah²⁶ and of others against the prayers and cult of Israel and Judah. There is no meaning in them unless they are motivated by steadfast love.²⁷

5) To pray is to communicate oneself to God totally and radically in all one's uniqueness and mystery much as one does to a genuine and trustworthy friend. The person in prayer can unfold himself so totally to God that one cannot think of any limits or restrictions in this. This total openness to and unrestricted trust in God constitute the essence of prayer.

6) Prayer is the consuming of a lesser love by a greater love. For St. Teresa prayer is love, the love which contains within itself the whole of creation and which offers it back to the Source from which it came. The God who loves, offering us His whole self in the fullness of His love, desires our love and patiently awaits our response. Prayer is this response of love.²⁸

2. Practical application

1) Since love is the content and aim of contemplation, it should, from the very beginning, be the direct object of our endeavour. It is inadvisable to look feverishly for new thoughts and insights in prayer, for all that love desires is the presence of the beloved. There should be nothing standing between the praying person and the eternal Love; Love has only one desire, namely, to have the beloved before its eyes and to rest peacefully in his company. As love also yearns to know more about the beloved, it looks at him from every angle, considers him closely and keeps him ever in mind and eventually resolves to imitate him.

Love gives rise to other virtues, especially the ordinary ones and emphasis is laid on these. Moments of supremely blissful enjoyment of love are few in the life of lovers; the greater part of their lives is spent in the drudgery of their respective works and duties. Here love appears as loyalty,

25) 5:15; 6:21-24

26) 1:10-17

27) *Hos* 6:6

28) Cf. Mary Regele, "The Teresian Art of Praying", *Spiritual Life*, 19(1973) pp. 86-87

patience and service. The same is true in the case of the lovers of God.

2) Even though love is the source of the contemplative's knowledge of God, yet concepts are necessary in mystical contemplation, in spite of their incapability in making one reach the higher experiential knowledge of God. Concepts and conceptual propositions of theology can condition the mystical wisdom about God and give specific form to it.

3) Love is dynamic. Its first stage may be called effective love or the love of the will. It seeks to conform our will to the will of God. It encompasses every one of our activities both external and internal and makes them an effort to please God. Devetailing of our will with God's becomes its constant concern.

But the lover, far from being satisfied with this activity of the will, yearns to know God better in order to give himself to Him and to possess Him. This is the second stage of love which may be called affectionate love or the love of the heart. This love affects our total personality invading our soul, urging it and carrying it along in a blessed violence and brings to perfection the love of the will. Such passionate and total love can fill the void in our being and make us give our whole selves to God radically in a profound love.

This affectionate love can so flood the will that it will induce it to do with great zeal and courage whatever might please the Lord and thus be a help to effective love. Affective love itself, if genuine, will necessarily be also love of the will as well as of all other faculties of man with the result that the person begins to lead a contemplative life.

4) The unifying power of prayer is not directed to God alone; it embraces also one's brothers and sisters causing the one who prays to be ever more deeply united with them. For, to be united to God is to be united to His entire family; to be closer to God is to be closer to all life. In fact, prayer gives entrance not merely into the life of the Blessed Trinity but also into the mystery of God's whole creation. This is why the life of fraternal charity is the test of the genuineness of one's prayer life.

5) Prayer is not to be restricted to the hours of prayer; our whole life has to become a prayer. For, our life is love and prayer is nothing but the expression of love. In the case of lovers, their whole life is motivated by love. Every moment of their life, just as every moment in their life, arises from love. Love is their life. It should be the same with the love of God too, for God has a greater claim to our love than any human person whose charm and attractiveness comes from Him.

For him who is filled with an affective love for God, any little thing he does is quickened by a real and habitual love and is motivated by a desire to please God and thus it becomes a prayer. The special hours of prayer are for him nothing but long-desired moments when he can set aside all his various cares and withdraw himself into the heart of his love, into a more perfect union with his Beloved.

Hours of explicit prayer are necessary on account of human weakness and on account of the various causes constantly trying to loosen man's relationship with God. With those whose hearts tend towards God, hours of prayer are a need because they wish to hand the reins of their hearts over to God in order to live fully. With those whose hearts are attracted towards earthly things, it is a matter of necessity. The spring has been released in the course of the day and it needs re winding. We can never reach the habit of being present to God always unless we make it a point to do so at certain hours of the day. Conversely, we can never pray well at the time of personal prayer unless we try to pray always.

F. Mystical prayer as tasting God

1. Theoretical explanation

1) In mystical prayer we perceive God or the truths of faith in a manner that is beyond the bounds of human powers in themselves. This perception is a new way of knowledge and love, as in the case of the beatific vision but without its clarity, extension and permanence. Mystical knowledge is therefore rightly styled as a quasi-experimental perception of God and

of His mysteries. The mystic is said to touch and experience God. The emphasis in mysticism is on the direct and intimate awareness of God's presence. The basis of mysticism is the conviction that God is related to man in such a way that the finite man is able to really taste God.

2) Mystical prayer is a supernatural experience of God as He is in Himself. Essentially, mystical experience is a vivid, conscious participation of our soul and of its faculties in the life, knowledge, and love of God Himself. This participation is metaphysically possible only because sanctifying grace is imparted to us, giving our nature the power to elicit acts which are entirely beyond its own capacity.

More particularly, however, the mystical experience is directly caused by special inspirations of the Holy Spirit substantially present within the soul itself and already obscurely identified with it by grace. The outcome of these inspirations is to help the soul to see and appreciate, in a way totally new and unexpected, the complete reality of the truths contained in the hitherto "untasted" conceptual statements about God. But above all, this experience gives us a deep penetration into the truth of our identification with God by grace. Contemplative experience in the strict sense of the word is always an experience of God who is seen not as an abstraction, not as a distant and alien Being, but as intimately immediately present to the soul in His infinite reality and essence.²⁹

3) Mystical experience brings God near to us with a direct knowledge that can be termed quasi-experimental. When we have a direct contact with an object through the senses we are said to have experimental knowledge, e. g., seeing or hearing a friend. We have a quasi-experimental knowledge of God when we know Him *as if* by directly contacting Him. According to theologians, this knowledge is not so direct, immediate and clear as that of the Beatific Vision. As long as we are on earth even our highest knowledge of God will always be based on the virtue of faith, supported by the gift of wisdom and because of this reason it is called quasi-experimental. It is a

29) Thomas Merton, *The Ascent to Truth*, op. cit., pp. 12-13

knowledge as though we had the immediate vision of God. From the practical point of view this distinction is not quite relevant to the soul experiencing the presence of God because it has the irrefutable assurance that it possesses God and does not bother about the manner of this possession.

The mystic feels the presence of God and this feeling admits of many degrees, not all of which are of ecstatic nature. Sometimes this presence is experienced as a faint drawing of the soul by God. At other times the soul experiences in unknowable ways the presence of God with a certainty that cannot be proved.

4) Christianity has always understood mysticism as direct experience of God. By sanctifying grace there is established a direct mutual relationship between man and God: God abides in man. But the beginner is not in a position to experience this divine presence in himself. Externally it is difficult to distinguish between those who are in grace and those who are in sin. We also know from faith that a person who receives communion with due dispositions is united with Christ in a special way. Seldom does the worthy recipient of Communion experience this ineffable union. On the contrary, in a mystical experience the mystic has a direct contact with God in the psychological sense. He knows for certain God dwells in him. In the literal sense he becomes a tabernacle of God. For the mystic the presence of God is no more a mere believed truth but an experienced fact. With a peculiar awareness the mystic tastes God. If one were to seek an explanation of this unique awareness, we may say that this awareness is the outcome of grace become conscious. We are in the state of grace and we are aware of it only in a vague manner. The mystic has a clear and profound awareness of it. He is able to feel his life of grace. When grace becomes conscious in the mystic, he begins to taste God's presence in himself.

2. Practical application

1) The supreme moments of mystical experience must inspire us to carry on with our prayer life. We cannot be expected to go on living only on high moments. A comparison may be

made with the experience of friendship. We have unique moments of deep amazement in friendship which remain conspicuous in the long and sometimes difficult process of its growth. Yet even in this ordinary period we experience moments which forebode something more exciting to come.

2) When we think of the mystical experience of God we are inclined to envisage a Bernadette in her visions, a St. Paul in his ecstasy or a Joan of Arc surrounded by voices. We tend to imagine the whole place around the mystic to be luminous with brilliant light, sweetened with exquisite sentiments of devotion and flanked by singing cherubims. But such spectacular phenomena need not accompany the mystical experience of God.

An example from the Old Testament will illustrate this point. In the Book of Kings we read of prophet Elishah who was once standing on a hill. All of a sudden a violent wind strong enough to crack rocks blew all around him. We are told that God was not there in that violent wind. Next came an earthquake that shook the hill where he stood. The earthquake was followed by a ravaging fire. Yet God was neither in the earthquake nor in the fire. Then Elishah heard a small, quiet voice and in it God was found. That little, feeble voice is an image of the experience of God in the ordinary life of Christians.

We have clear and compelling evidences for the closeness of God in our daily lives. Often God is near to us in a passing smile or in a shared work. In those moments life seems different to us in consequence of a glimpse into God's nearness. Our faith is strengthened and we derive added courage to press on with our monotonous life because we are supported by the awareness that God is with us. The time of the Eucharistic Sacrifice and especially that of Holy Communion are singular moments of God's nearness to us.

3) The tasting of God in mystical prayer has nothing in common with some of the customary emotional consolations. We all have had experience of these consolations at one time or other in our lives in the presence of something we perceived as

good or beautiful. These consolations are very common in the experience of love. Although these emotional experiences are designed by God also for the benefit of our spiritual life, they are different from mystical experience. These experiences may be regarded as the human counterpart of mystical experience.

This does not mean that a mystical experience has no strong emotional overtones. There is often an emotional overflow from the spirit of man to his body. But in mystical prayer what predominates is not emotions but the awareness of God as lovingly present to oneself. The mystic is mainly interested in God's presence within himself and is rather indifferent to its emotional repercussions.

4) The present-day culture is averse to granting a place to God in human life. In such a situation Christians are all the more required to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world as demanded by Christ. The Good News is to be lived relevantly in our times by witnessing to Jesus' living and preaching of the closeness of God to man. God is really our Father because He is so near to us.

This nearness of God is to be experienced by us, Christians. Only then can we bear witness to it and impart renewed strength and inspiration to all around us. Our world has a great need of living Christian examples of deep awareness of God.

G. Mystical prayer as sharing in the inter-Trinitarian Life

1. Theoretical reflection

1) The Christian mystical life testifies to the mystery of the Holy Trinity, which is the cardinal truth of Christian revelation. The truth that there is One God in Three Persons seems to be strange and remote to the modern consciousness, which, apparently, is allergic to mystery and theology. One would suppose that the subtlety and complexity of Trinitarian theology would drive present day contemplatives to God in His unity than His mystery as Triune. But there can be no Christian

mysticism that is not Trinitarian, i. e., that has no reference to the revelation of the Father in the Son through the Holy Spirit.

Of course, a clear insight into the mystery of the processions of the Three Divine Persons is excluded from Christian mysticism. What we mean is that mysticism gives a taste of the inner life of God by a sort of connaturality insofar as we are, by grace, shares in that life. Thus through the love which is the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Christian mystic experiences something of that love which has been revealed by God as His own Being. This loving knowledge is more the effect of personal identification with God than that of intellectual study. This process of personal identification is termed as *connaturality*.

2) That mystical prayer is sharing in the Trinitarian life is clear also from the understanding of Christ regarding the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is focussed on the person of Jesus, and it is in Him that it is fully revealed. The relationship of the Son to the Father represents the relationship which Jesus has with God. There is exceptional intimacy in Jesus' address of God as *Abba*. The uniqueness of Jesus' relationship with God is evident in this statement of His: "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him".³⁰ This unique knowledge which Jesus Christ has of the Father is mystical in nature, and this knowledge is the font of Christian mysticism. Jesus Christ shares in the self-knowledge of the Father and the Christian mystic participates in this same knowledge. When St. Luke refers to this knowledge of Jesus he remarks: "In that hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit."³¹ This knowledge of Jesus Christ about His Father is communicated to Him by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Here we have an insight into the essence of Christian mystical knowledge. It is a sharing, through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit, in the self-knowledge of God which Jesus Christ possesses in its fulness.

30) Mt 11:27

31) Lk 10:21

St. Paul highlights this essential element of Christian mysticism when he writes to the Romans: "When we cry: Abba, Father, it is the Spirit of God bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God."³² and to the Galatians: "Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying: Abba, Father".³² Thus Jesus shares with us the very intimacy which He has with God, namely the intimacy which enables Him to address God, "Abba, Father". By this sharing we are able to experience ourselves as sons and daughters of God.

3) From the testimonies of Christian mystics it is clear that, at its summit, mystical experience means a discovery of the Blessed Trinity in oneself and a participation in Its life. In mystical prayer one discovers the mutual relations of the Son with the Father and with the Holy Spirit by participating in the Sonship of Christ. That is why the mystical life is an on-going revelation of the Three Divine Persons in one's experience. It is going to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit.

2. Practical application

1) We must not stress the Trinitarian aspect of Christian mysticism to the point of overlooking its incarnational aspect. We Christians basically experience God in Christ. Christian mysticism is an incarnational mysticism. The transcendent mystery that is the object of Christian mysticism is present in the person of Christ.

2) The mystery of God that is in Christ is also present in the Church, because the Church is the Mystical Body of Christ. The Spirit of God that makes us sons and daughters of God, makes us at the same time members of one body and members of each other. This communitarian aspect of Christian mysticism is not to be overlooked. Although each one possesses the Spirit individually, it is one and the same Spirit that is possessed by all and all are built together into a "temple of God in the

32) *Rom* 8:15

33) *Gal* 4:6

Spirit".³⁴ We are united to God through mystical prayer but by the same mystical prayer we are united with one another. This union even goes far beyond humanity and extends to the whole of creation.

3) In order to participate in Christ's experience of God in mystical prayer, we have to participate also in His death and resurrection. St. Paul tells us that "all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death".³⁵ There is no mystical tradition which does not include death to one's empirical self as the way to a rebirth into an authentic human life. Christian life is a continuous growth in the death and resurrection of Christ. It is "putting off the old nature" which is vitiated by sin and "putting on the new nature created after the likeness of God",³⁶ and finally expecting the last stage of the death and resurrection of Christ, namely the eternal life.

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34) *1 Cor* 3:16

35) *Rom* 6:3

36) *Eph* 4:22-24

Renewal of Mystical Theology

There is a need in our age for a renewed mystical theology especially in view of the fact that we are facing today new problems, such as those that arise from drug culture, from contact with Oriental mysticism, etc. These problems cannot be solved by referring to the writings of classical mystical theologians such as St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila. Instead of merely repeating what these great theologians have said, we must imbibe their spirit and do what they did for their generation, namely, present a mystical theology that is relevant to our times. This will mean, among other things, seriously taking into account the spectacular progress that our age has witnessed in the field of sciences such as biblical research, archeology, brain research, neurophysiology, sociology and psychology.

A. Renewed interest in mysticism today

Mysticism can be said to be a phenomenon that is fast sweeping the contemporary world. The last decade has seen a rise in interest in mysticism everywhere. Even the secularly minded psychologists and scientists are feeling more and more compelled to admit that mystical experience is a factor to be seriously reckoned with in the study of the human personality. Several religious thinkers consider mysticism as the core element of all religious experience. Scholars in Oriental religions regard it as the key to the treasures locked up in these religions. And most significantly, hundreds and thousands of ordinary people around the world are feeling the need for a deeper human life and are attracted to mystical experience. All in all, mysticism seems to fill the air we breathe and this air is expected to be more saturated with mysticism as we move towards the future. Some of the reasons for the renewed interest in mysticism are the following.

- 1) All the great religions hold that one of the most significant goals of life is to have a unified vision of life and of the universe. This goal, which is one of the effects of mysticism, is

very attractive to our present generation that has lost all unified vision in the quandary of partial visions of reality.

2) Nothing in the world can adequately satisfy the human heart. This is another way of saying that only the Absolute Good can fully satisfy it. This inner drive towards the Absolute Good is the basis of mysticism. This drive is all the more urgent today because modern man has had the opportunity to taste all possible created goods to a greater degree than ever before.

3) Another reason for the special attraction to mysticism is the fact that modern man is overpowered by the pressure of monotonous work and by the din of the communication media. As a result he feels the urge to flee from the realm of thoughts and feelings, for he has very little energy left for thinking and feeling any more.

It is more attractive for him to go down into the region of silence within himself. The greater and greater disinterest shown in vocal prayers today could be a manifestation of the desire to go deeper into oneself.

4) Since the seventeenth century our culture has more and more built up its scientific and rational knowledge at the expense of its intuitional side. The Church has always been called upon to balance the opposite poles of truth: the rational and philosophical, on the one hand, and the personal and mystic, on the other. But an imbalance in the Church's presentation, a seeming stress upon the rational and institutional, has led many today to believe that the only way to find transcendence and religious experience is to go beyond rationalism. Interest in mystical spirituality seems to flourish when institutional religion stagnates or stratifies. Mystical spirituality then refurbishes the institutional Church by equalizing the tension between the rational and the institutional. We are coming to see that Christianity, which for too long stressed its rational and philosophical side, must once again emphasize its supra-rational or mystical aspect. Christianity today is challenged to balance the gap between the rational and the mystical. It is

called upon to demonstrate once again the truth that God is found and existentially experienced in this life.¹

5) The contemporary renewed interest in mysticism points to the anthropological fact that man is not a completed spiritual system and hence is in need of further evolution in the area of the spirit. Modern man is in the throes of a higher evolution towards greater spirituality and in this process mysticism has a decisive role to play. The last decade has been witnessing a sudden leap forward in the development of spiritual humanity and as a result we are face to face with a new man who is more mystical.

A few practical conclusions may be drawn from the renewed interest in mysticism today. In the first place, the Church has a unique opportunity of presenting once again a credible and attractive Gospel to the modern world if it is prepared to read the signs of the times and give more attention to its mystical dimension.

Secondly, the Church always needs the mystics for its authentic growth and renewal. Throughout history the generality of the people have received enlightenment and inspiration from the mystics. Every epoch and every society needs its own prophets and seers. A society that does not have a few mystics among its members cannot hope to flourish.

Thirdly, we must be careful against unhealthy motivations contributing towards greater interest in mysticism. If we are not on our guard mysticism can be another fad or a pretext for escaping from the problems of life.

The affluence of certain countries and persons has encouraged a willingness to experiment new ideals, fashions and movements. Once a person has had the convenience to try out all material things, he is naturally led to experiment spiritual realities. In the affluent parts of the world, material interests have proved largely to be tedious and unsatisfying. It would be

1) E. Aleotti, "What is Christian Mysticism?", *Cross and Crown*. 26 (1974) pp. 393-394.

no wonder if people in this situation move to some other fads according to them such as mysticism.

The turbulence of the last decades have made the lives of many frightening and frustrating. Serious problems have cropped up in the lives of many people that can be solved only by hard work and good will. New religious phenomena can appear very enticing for those who feel themselves unequal to the tasks before them. At such a juncture the attraction to pass from the confusion of the city to the calm of the countryside, from the vexation of politics and industry to the tranquility of a simple life, from the frenetic exhaustion of monotonous labour to the blissful quietude of meditation, can be pressing indeed.

B. Problems of mystical theology

Mystical theology seeks to understand the highest union of man with God outside of the beatific vision and to help us to distinguish between experience that is truly supernatural and that which is not from God. Mystical theology is to be distinguished from mystical prayer. Mystical prayer is experience while mystical theology is a reflection on this experience. Mystical experience is the basic thing and it is ineffable and all efforts to formulate it are totally inadequate. Yet we need to interpret mystical experience and to find its meaning. We need to distinguish the authentic from the inauthentic. Then there is the practical need to guide people, to protect them from mistakes, and illusions and to help them to understand what is happening in their lives and save them from unnecessary suffering. Besides we must learn all we can, even conceptually, about the action of the divine in the human.²

One of the chief problems of mystical theology is to account for a loving, unitive and supernatural love of God that is beyond concepts, and to do so in a language that does not in one way or other become completely misleading.³ The mystical theologian faces the problem of saying what cannot be

2) William Johnston, *The Inner Eye of Love*, London, 1978, p. 43.

3) Thomas Merton, Forward, in: W. Johnston, *The Mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing*, St. Meinrad, 1967, p. ix.

really said. One of the ways of attacking this problem has been opened up by the so-called apophatic theology, the theology of "unknowing", which describes the transcendent experience of God in love as a "knowing by unknowing" and a "seeing that is not seeing".

Mystical theology is negative in the sense that every positive statement is immediately qualified with: "but that is not it". One cannot grasp the idea of "unknowing" as long as one clings to the notion of God conceived as a definite object.

Any experience of God as possessing some finite form or idea which we can grasp is an experience not of God but only of something that remotely resembles Him in an analogical way. There is nothing whatever in existence that even remotely resembles God as He is in Himself, and yet the "knowing" of God in "unknowing", far from being unreal and uncertain, possesses the highest reality and certainty of any experience accessible to man.

Anyone who has studied even a little of mystical theology will realize that the subject is full of pitfalls. The mystic and the mystical theologian must choose their words with the utmost care, for, a slight deviation from accuracy may lead to, or be interpreted as pantheism or gnosticism or any one of a variety of ideologies to which the writer does not in fact subscribe.

C. The inadequacies of traditional mystical theology

As is the case with every department of theology, we are far from achieving a theological synthesis with regard to Christian mysticism. Our first attempt in our effort to renew mystical theology must be to overcome the inadequacies of past mystical theology, some of which are discussed here.

1) Traditional mystical theology does not seem to have paid adequate attention to the contextual nature of the classics of mystical prayer. There ought to be a rediscovering of the historical context of Christian mystical writings before we can move towards a more authentic mystical theology. In other words, we have to read them on their own terms taking into consideration the historical context of each of them as well as the

purpose of their authors. Those who teach mystical theology should provide historical and literary introductions to the classics of mystical theology. It is high time that we, following the lead given by modern biblical scholarship, turn to a historical study and literary analysis of the spiritual classics in order to gain a sound understanding of them. The failure to do so can often lead to incorrect conclusions. For instance, it is impossible to have an adequate understanding of the works of St. John of the Cross without the awareness that he was a poet. As a poet, he employs similes and metaphors and his remarks about man and his dignity are couched in a poetical language that compares the human with the divine. Without an awareness of this fact one is likely to come up with false notions about man. Therefore it is imperative that we discover the specific historical character of our spiritual classics if we are to avoid the danger of making a static and one-sided caricature of mystical experience. Only by entering into a dialogue with them on their own terms, can we inject a new vitality into our mystical theology.

2) The long history of the development of the Christian mystical tradition has been powerfully influenced by the works of Pseudo-Dionysius, which were regarded, for more than a millennium, as the works of Dionysius the Areopagite who was converted by St. Paul at Athens⁴, and hence enjoying great authority. We had to wait until the nineteenth century to establish with certitude that these works belonged to the latter half of the fifth century and were an endeavour at synthesizing Christianity and Neoplatonism. Their doctrine on prayer betrays a strong Neoplatonic influence, based as they are on the conception that man's physical nature is an obstacle to his spiritual life. The author holds that salvation consists in the gradual liberation of the soul from its prison which is the human body. He also maintains that all our positive understanding of God are corrupted by the bodily senses from which they spring. It is difficult to see how such a preponderantly negative doctrine about spiritual life can be reconciled with the Christian doctrine of faith that through Incarnation God has revealed Himself to men in terms of their humanity. The author seems to distort the Christian teaching that man is an inseparable body-soul

4) *Acts*. 17: 34.

entity and consequently, his salvation consists in the total redemption of his humanity by Christ, the Word made Flesh.

This is not to say that there is nothing of value in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius. But much that is contained in his works is based on positions that are so distinctively unchristian that it makes the authority accorded to it manifestly unwarranted.

3) Another factor that introduced some incorrect tendencies into mystical theology was the undue veneration given to St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila, since the sixteenth century. So widely was their approach to mystical prayer acknowledged that until recently, the phrase mystical prayer was applied only in the case of those who accepted their approach and followed their rules. It would be a great mistake to identify mystical prayer with the mystical experience of the Spanish mystics. Neither would it be correct to imply that St. John and St. Teresa were in possession of some spiritual superiority unavailable to others. By identifying the highest mystical prayer with the specific experiences of the Spanish mystics, traditional thinking has unwittingly done a great disservice to mysticism. It has discouraged hundreds of promising candidates for mysticism just because their experiences could not coincide with those of St. John of the Cross or of St. Teresa.

A. Poulain cautions us against saying that the last word on mysticism has been said and the day for further inquiry in this area is past⁵. No human science can ever have said its last word. In our days the descriptive sciences – and mysticism is one of them – never cease to accumulate facts. We must not suppose that past books have described every detail and that they have answered every question. In the course of the centuries we find mystical descriptions becoming continually more and more exact. Writers arrive gradually, although very slowly, at distinguishing, one from another, states which had previously been confused; and they find happier comparisons by which to depict them. In this respect mysticism participates in the for-

5) A. Poulain, *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, London, 1950, p. xii.

ward movement which is to be seen in all sciences. There is no reason to believe that this progress will be arrested. Our successors will do better than ourselves.

The above remarks should by no means be construed as a slight to the two universally accepted masters of mystical prayer. These observations should not be taken to suggest that the old spiritual classics are anachronisms that are irrelevant to the contemporary Christian. Indeed they contain truths that are universally applicable and which can be ignored only at one's peril. Reading and re-reading them are a great aid to prayer. It would be the height of arrogance to assert that we can learn little from them.

However they are to be read with the spirit of discernment. We should remember that they contain also elements that have validity for a particular period, situation or vocation. We should bear in mind that they were written at a time when the social conditions were greatly different from ours and that many of the insights which we possess today into psychology and sociology were not available to their authors. The ordinary Christians who are not able to distinguish between what is essential and what is accidental in mystical prayer can easily come to regard higher spiritual life as impossible.

We should not suppose that our prayer is not real unless we follow everyone of the prescriptions of the classical mystics. In fact, attempts at detailed application of their teachings will only succeed in discouraging us who live in conditions which it would have been impossible for them to imagine. Though the experiences of the masters can teach us much, they are not to be imitated literally.

There is no technique of mystical prayer that is ready-made for use. A person has to develop it for himself. In this process, knowledge gathered from mystical writings can be of use especially at the initial stage. But there should not be an over-dependence upon it, for the destruction of the deeply personal character of the process can negate the very process itself as well as its goal. Therefore, in trying to discover our particular way of prayer, we have to base ourselves on our own

experience of praying. In this the writing of the spiritual masters can be of great help to us insofar as they clarify our own experiences to us, encourage us on our way and help us by other valuable suggestions. No amount of reading about the spiritual journeys of the mystics can give us the experience of journeying or lead us effectively to the same experience of journeying, for even in making the same journey, no two persons can have the same experience. We have our own temperaments and outlooks and so we make our own explorations and discoveries.

4) Traditional mystical theology smacked of monasticism. In the past most of those who dealt with mystical prayer authoritatively were monks or nuns living in religious communities or in solitude. Their situation in life and their manner of call to prayer were vastly different from those of persons engaged in active life today and these constitute the great bulk of the people of God. Evidently a mystical system developed in such conditions of life cannot be expected to be quite relevant to people living and working in the world.

5) Under the impact of rationalism and empiricism, two elements of modern thought, mystical theology was deprived of its essential note of mystery. Without mystery mystical theology is reduced to nothing more than a description of ascetical exercises. In a world view where mystery has no place and where we cannot know anything except through a process of objectification, mysticism cannot have any meaning at all.

6) Another defect that crept into mystical theology from contemporary culture was individualism. As a result, the corporate ecclesial character of religious experience was de-emphasized and mysticism became strictly a private affair between God and the individual. Since the early medieval monastic mysticism and especially since the Renaissance, there has not been an adequate recognition of the corporate context of mysticism. This situation was reinforced by the extraordinary growth of individualism in modern times. We can only hope that we will soon be able to see the person in proper relationship to the community.

7). Elitism was another characteristic that became endemic to mystical theology. Mysticism is not something that can be

restricted to a fortunate few. It has a much wider area of life to cover than the extra-ordinary contemplative experience of God which by its nature remains attainable only to a few. It should, rather, be seen as a way of life for all which, in some cases, may reach a point that could be considered extra-ordinary. Had our discussions of mystical life not been restricted to extraordinary experiences of God, probably there would have been many more who might now have been placed on a par with our renowned mystics.

b) The purely pragmatic approach adopted towards mystical theology reducing it to a brief course to be taught to seminarians who would be required later on to direct those involved in mystical prayer, made it too clerical a science to raise many questions. The absence of searching questions spelled the stagnation or decay of the science of mystical theology. For a long period the few questions asked in mystical theology courses were motivated often by a pastoral concern and were chiefly about the normalcy of the mystical life, the signs of one's call to move to a simpler way of prayer and descriptions of mystical experience. The isolation of mystical theology from the rest of life and from other branches of theology was a product of this narrow approach. Just as moral theology has begun to relate itself to the rest of theology and more importantly, to life itself, so also mystical theology, which has not yet been sufficiently fertilized by biblical orientation, historical consciousness and a vitalizing contact with life, has to break out of its isolation in order to come alive in our times.

When mystical theology is open to the mystery of man and of God, it will be able to go beyond the narrow limits that it has built around itself. It must moreover reflect on the experiences of past and present mystics. It must also explore the community dimension of the experience of God so as to avoid the danger of privatizing mystical life. The elitist and clerical character of mystical theology should be weeded out and an awareness of the implications of the universal call to perfection should be allowed to take deep root in its place. Finally, mystical theology needs to develop an ongoing contact with life and with other departments of theology in order to be dynamic and meaningful. Though a full synthesis is not in sight as yet, a

new orientation will, hopefully, succeed in imparting a deep and vital understanding of mysticism to the men and women of our times who are anxiously seeking for the deeper values of life.

D. General notion of mystical prayer

Anyone who proposes to discuss mystical prayer is faced with the problem of the ambiguity of terminology. Mysticism is not easy to define. Yet we cannot proceed further without providing at least a working definition of mystical prayer.

George Maloney gives the following description of mysticism.⁶ In the Far East and in the Christian East of the Greek and Slavic world, mysticism is synonymous with being in touch with the "really real". Reality abides not in the changing, in the temporal, but in the unfathomable abyss where God speaks within the heart of man in silence. Mysticism is a living experience of God, not as an object outside of us, but as an encompassing power of permeating love that, as St. Augustine said, is more intimate to us than we to ourselves. At the centre of our deepest awareness, beyond our habitual preconditioning of sense and emotional and intellectual responses, we are gradually purified of our false ego orientation in order to open ourselves towards the Allness of God.

This openness is attained in a gradual process of communion that unfolds in the ever-deepening silencing of our own inordinate desires and sense of independence and in the surrendering of ourselves to God's will. Mysticism moves beyond the Cartesian duality of subject and object in order to experience God as the very inner force within us and all around us, supporting all being in His mighty, transcending creativity.

Intrinsic to any authentic mysticism is a conscious, immediate communion of the soul with the Transcendent Source of all beings. This communion is progressively felt to be a union through assimilation, a continued surrendering of the one possessed, namely, man to the loving power of the possessor, namely, God. It is a leaving behind of the operations of the senses,

6) George Maloney. *The Breath of the Mystic*, Denville, New Jersey, 1974, pp. 7-15.

emotions, and intellectual powers in order to delve deep into one's own being. The mystic is simply a person who meets God in an ever deepening openness to the "Living Mystery" within him. He is one who consciously lets the Breath of God breathe in him.

In order to have a clearer understanding of mystical prayer William Meninger compares it to human friendship.⁷ To answer the question what is mystical prayer we have to look at it as a human relationship. For indeed it is so. Because it is the relationship of a human person with God it must, as are all his relationships, be a human relationship. A simple understanding of this obvious fact will take us a long way in understanding mystical prayer.

The man-to-God relationship is human. Obviously it is a graced relationship, but, nonetheless, it is still human. A man-to-man relationship is also human, and it is by understanding this kind of relationship that we can come to a deeper understanding of the man-to-God relationship which is prayer. We may take a concrete example of a man-to-woman relationship to help us to understand our prayer relationship with God. At some social gathering John meets Mary. Now if John and Mary simply stand there awkwardly staring at nothing and saying nothing, the relationship will end before it really begins. And so, with so superficial and external a beginning, John and Mary enter that level of human relationship that we call acquaintance. It is not a deep relationship and should they find it difficult to continue the conversation, the ensuing silence would be uncomfortable, even embarrassing. At this level, such personal things, as deeper aspirations, peak experiences, intimate feelings, or life goals are not shared.

This then is a human relationship on the first level of acquaintance. The couple meet, introduced by a third party who gives them some mutual background, and they pursue the relationship from there or allow it to die. Understanding that our

7) William Meninger, "Contemplative Prayer: Many Are Called", *Review for Religious*, 38 (1979) pp. 335-339.

prayer relationship is simply a human relationship with God, it, too, must have an acquaintance level. And it does have. This began for most of us in early childhood when a third party, perhaps our mother or father, introduced us to God, gave us some background and told us that God loved us and would answer prayers. And so began our first level of relationship with God, the level of acquaintance. This level expressed itself most in the simpler prayers requesting favours or in memorized prayers said without any profound comprehension.

But let us return to our example of John and Mary. As a result of the small talk characteristic of their acquaintance-relationship, each begins to recognize in the other certain qualities which make their relationship worth pursuing. Each desires to get to know the other better. In order to do this, they make a "date", they make arrangements to get together, just the two of them, so that they can share and become further acquainted with those attractive qualities they are beginning to recognize in each other.

Now they begin to reveal more and more of their personal feeling, experiences, ideas and goals in their conversation. Perhaps John tells Mary things about himself that he has never before revealed to anyone. And so we do just what John and Mary did - we make a "date" with God! We go apart with Him in order to learn more about Him and also to reveal to Him intimate, personal thoughts and concerns. This is done in many different ways. We may attend some form of religious instruction where we learn to know God better. We may read and meditate and listen to the Scriptures where God personally reveals Himself to us. Whatever the source, we begin to allow His truths to form our lives. We talk over with Him our successes and failures and our new beginnings. We internalize His truths and live His life of grace as we witness them in others or as we read the reflections of others about them. In other words, by reflection or "discursive meditation" as we call it, we become accustomed to speaking with God on a personal level, receiving truths of His revelation. Our acquaintanceship with God has deepened to the level of friendship.

Let us look now at the third level of a developing human relationship as we see it in John and Mary. As they continue to grow closer to one another, the relationship between John and Mary takes on physical overtones. They desire not only the intimacy of shared thoughts, but also physical closeness. This level of relationship, sometimes called romantic love, when it has been preceded by a genuine friendship, represents an authentic growth in the relationship of John and Mary. This affective relationship will develop most completely in marriage where the sharing of both personalities find their fullest expression.

But how can this human relationship on the physical, affective level express itself in our human, prayer relationship with God? It must do this somehow if, as we have been insisting, our prayer-relationship is a human one. And it does! Spiritual masters have given us many descriptions of this level of prayer. During this period, prayer often takes the form of intimate conversations with God, not infrequently accompanied by tears, profound, emotionally felt sorrow for sins and lively joy at the realization of God's love and redemptive activity.

Now for a final look at John and Mary. We may picture them after many years of a long, sometimes difficult, but still happy marriage. Their children are grown, married and gone. John and Mary are back where they began—just the two of them sitting alone on an evening in their home. John perhaps is reading the sports page. Mary is knitting booties for a grandchild. Neither is speaking. Indeed, Mary knows by now just how John feels about everything under the sun. John is equally aware of Mary's thoughts. Yet there is a deep communion between them that does not require words. They are happy just to be in one another's presence. This is what we call the relationship or love. Verbal expressions, words and symbols are no longer necessary or even adequate for John and Mary to communicate. Their deeper relationship is known, felt and expressed by something much more complete than the partial, inadequate attempts to verbalize it. Presence to one another without words or other external signs can be the fullest expression of this human relationship of love.

And so it is in our developing relationship with God. The fourth level of our prayer is the relationship of love, or, what we call mystical prayer. It is a simple, quiet, peaceful abiding in His presence. One old man who spent hours daily in the church was once asked by St. John Vianney what he did during all that time. "I don't do anything", he replied. "I just look at Him and He looks at." This is mystical prayer.

Mystical prayer is a very natural, very simple, although graced thing which is lived rather than taught. It is a quiet, loving gazing on the face of God with the eyes of the soul, who is recognized, often even felt by His touching the soul, as present. God is known now, not through the mediation of words or thoughts or things. These have been used in earlier relationships and have served their purpose. God is seen now with and within the innermost centre of the soul, not in light but in darkness, a darkness which is not the mere absence of light but the blinding effulgence of infinite light.

F. Ordinary and extraordinary mystical prayer

I would distinguish between ordinary (non-classical) and extraordinary (classical) mystical prayer. Some persons experience mysticism in the ordinary way and may not even be aware that they are mystics. Others experience God in a more conspicuous and extraordinary manner.

1) I have yet to find a more excellent description of ordinary and extraordinary mystical prayer than that of Sister Ruth Burrows.⁸ She calls them by different names, namely, "light off" and "light on" experience of God. There are two ways of experiencing mystical union. By this we do not merely refer to full and transforming union, the culmination of the spiritual life, but to those partial unions which happen all along the way, when God touches our being with His own and for that instant unites it to Himself. In all mystical union from first to last there are two different ways of experience, which could be called "light off" and "light on".

8) Ruth Burrows, *Guidelines for Mystical Prayer*, London, 1976, pp. 45-56.

When God touches our being with His own Being, when He gives Himself to us as God, He must necessarily bypass the ordinary routes into the self and create one for Himself which only He can use. It means that this visitation, this contact, is, of itself, inaccessible to ordinary perception. By the very nature of things it must be secret and hidden. This normal obscurity may be called "light off". Something unspeakably wonderful is happening in the depths of self and the self cannot see it. No light shines on it. There are effects flowing from this happening and these are consciously experienced, but not the happening itself. "Light off" is the normal mode of God's action in prayer.

However, it is possible for God to switch on light, so to speak, so that what is happening may be "seen". What this faculty is by which we "see", we do not know. What we want to stress is that the fundamental happening is the same; the switching on of the light does not add to it or change it in any way. For this to be the usual mode of receiving the mystical embrace is exceedingly rare. A "light on" stage as distinct from an occasional reception of "light on" may perhaps occur no more than few times in an era. It has a prophetic character. The one so endowed understands beyond the ken of human kind and he or she must enlighten others. This light throws its beams on the ordinary way and enables us to understand it. St. John and St. Teresa belong to this category of "light on". This is not because of their intense, sublime emotional states, for these can equally belong to "light off", but because of their ability to analyze spiritual states. They see what is happening.

We shall say something on the "light off" and "light on" experience of the final stage. For one thing, it is only in this final stage that "light off" can really know where he is and what has happened to him. He knows with deep certainty that he is intimately united to God, and this reality is shown by the way he lives. We have only to recall how certain St. Theresa of the Child Jesus was of her state in spite of the darkness she was in. There is a constant certitude though nothing is seen and nothing is felt. The person does not see God; what he does see is himself. He does not see God enfolding him nor what He is doing, but rather the effect of this in himself. The essence of this state

is that God has taken over, despoiled him of his powers and replaced the ego. The effect of all this in the conscious life is one of despoliation and emptiness.

On the other hand, in the "light on" state, the same basic reality, the union, is not only known with certainty, but it is also seen. It does not fill the consciousness all the time; otherwise life would cease. But the person sees that he is held in God's embrace. His whole being knows it and responds by surrendering to God's love. But as it is question of God himself, this seeing is non-conceptual; it simply cannot be held by the mind, looked at, still less described. This "light on" state is not often understood because it is rare. Unless one knows it by experience it will be easy to confuse it with various psychic states.

It is possible for God to switch on the light occasionally for one who is normally in the "light off" state. His purpose may be to encourage and enlighten him. But this accessory "light on" adds nothing to the basic grace. It is the happening that matters, not the mode of experience. What is more, of itself, it is no criterion of progress. It is not a question of a certain point of progress being reached before God can give it. It can happen at a very early stage if God wills.

What is felt is relatively unimportant. Both the "light off" and the "light on" can be certain that they are in a state of transforming union. The one simply "knows", the other "sees", "feels" and "tastes". Though on the conscious level their experience has hardly anything in common there is perfect understanding between them. They speak the same language and enter into each other's deepest self because basically they are in the same state where Jesus is all.

Neither for the "light off" nor for the "light on" can we claim distinguishing favours. It would be a complete misconception to think of "light on" as a state abounding in favours such as vision, rapture, ecstasy, etc. The essential experience of "light on" is non-conceptual and it cannot be handled by the mind. It is indistinct and all-pervading. It has nothing to do with "things happening".

But if a "light on" person wanted to describe as best as he could what he saw of God holding the soul, then profoundly moved by what he saw, he might pour out the most extravagant images, all the while knowing that his words were totally inadequate to give any idea of this ineffable, non-conceptual reality. There is something of this in the Bible imagery. Here the wonder and magnitude of God's direct intervention perceived by the believing heart under its material form is painted in fantastic imagery: mountains skipping like rams, the sea fleeing and the earth rocking and so forth. Possibly this fact accounts for much of the exuberant descriptions of our mystics. However, this is clearly not the whole answer and we must say something more about favours.

Those in both categories of "light off" and "light on" are liable to psychic experiences. We could call them psychic echoes. Basically they are self-induced, not in the sense of self-deception, though this is possible, but as rising out of the psyche under certain stimuli, such as fasting drugs, aesthetic pleasure and so on. Natural mysticism claims similar phenomena. Human nature, at least in some people, reacts like this. Nothing more nor less than that need be involved. Yet it is these unimportant effects which are considered utterly relevant and sought after as being identified with the mystical state. They become the criteria by which the reality and depth of the mystical union are estimated. Inestimable loss has been caused by this misconception.

We could think of the recipients' psychological make-up as a channel: a deep straight canal, a rocky ravine, a shallow bed or whatever else. The overflow from the grace of union will flow into channel that is there and take its character from it: phlegmatic, choleric, depressive, etc. Reactions will differ widely. What is being revealed is not the grace as such but the psychic apparatus of the person and its reaction to stimuli. When these side-effects are taken for the reality or confused with it, we get a high appreciation of them and hence a desire for them. They are seen as signs of progress and therefore we want them. When the appreciation and expectancy are almost universal, the pressure is enormous and self-inducement all but inevitable. When this climate of expectancy is absent in a more sceptical

and psychologically knowledgeable culture, they are far less likely to happen. We can see this in communities, especially enclosed communities. If an influential person within it, say a prioress, goes in for "experiences in prayer", esteems them and communicates her esteem, invariably we will get an outbreak of them in the convent. Quite innocently others will produce them. They will become the "thing", the sign of an authentic mystical life. The tendency will be for those who are not so susceptible, to be considered less spiritual, non-contemplative. St. John of the Cross grasped the psychic character of these favours and hence his uncompromising teaching on detachment from them, although his own channel allowed an exuberant overflow of such favours. Since these favours come from the self and not necessarily are the touches of God, mere side-effects in certain people, one can get them at any stage, varying in proportion to the nature of the person.

The greatest caution must be used in assessing the quality of prayer by what we feel. Never should our feelings such as those of absorption, union, and awareness of God, be used as a criterion. On this point we may not be able to agree completely with St. Teresa. If we look at what she says of mansions four, five and six, we shall find descriptions of three forms of "absorbed" prayer. In mansion four, it is the will alone that is "held", and this she calls prayer of quiet. In mansion five, not only the will but the mind too is momentarily "held" and this is prayer of union. In mansion six, the whole person seems carried away and this is termed prayer of rapture. Teresa seems to see here a gradation: the more intense the emotional experience, the deeper the prayer. This assessment of prayer by emotional intensity is not quite acceptable. There is a very true sense in which progress in prayer consists in becoming more and more absorbed in God: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole soul, with thy whole mind and with all thy strength." A person can be absorbed in this way and yet never know the emotional states St. Teresa speaks of. On the other hand a person may abound in them and be very far from this total obsession with God.

One of the main reasons why so few attain union with God is because people want these things and seek them and

take a secret pride in them. God's touch always produce humility. But all too often these favours are a source of secret complacency and self-esteem. In reality they have no positive value in themselves. It is the state, not the awareness of the state, that matters and this is not so easy to assess as people think.

Over and over again we must stress that mystical prayer can be tested only by its results and never by what the recipient feels. The psychic experiences should not be despised, but on the other hand, they must be seen for what they are and not be confused with mystical graces. We must always stand in truth and not mistake shadows for substance. Those responsible for the guidance of others should be wary when appraising their accounts. How often we hear remarks such as "she can spend hours before the Blessed Sacrament; God gives her great graces", when sheer facts can demonstrate the purely natural sources of these states of consolation. The less attention we pay to what is felt, the less likely is delusion and its baleful consequences.

So far we have referred to consoling overflows or consolations but everything said of them applies equally to suffering ones. A beginner can feel abysmal horror and it may have nothing to do with God, though the sufferer will not believe that. Mystical suffering is nameless and the one in its throes would never dream of its origin. Once again, what God does in us always produces humility; all that comes from self, be it delight or suffering, tends to boost the ego. The touchstone of God at work is profound dissatisfaction with self, a sense of unimportance, whereas favours tend to nourish self-conceit.

When all is said and done, the long line of saints and spiritual writers who insist on experience, who speak of sanctity in terms of ever-deepening experience, who maintain that to have none of it is to be spiritually dead, are absolutely right provided we understand experience in the proper sense, not as a transient emotional impact but as living wisdom and living involvement. All the truths of faith that are in us will be translated into practical terms; all we believe will become principles

of action. Thus spiritual experience is as necessary a mark of a loving soul, of a holy person, as medical experience is of a doctor. So often, however, what the less instructed seek is mere emotion. They are not concerned with slow demanding generosity of genuine spiritual experience.

2) At the beginning of the spiritual life grace functions in a hidden way. Apparently the initiative is more ours than God's. But as we grow in our spiritual life, the gifts of the Holy Spirit takes the ascendancy over the virtues and we pass on to the mystical life. When the activity of the gifts is habitually and manifestly dominant in our life, we are certainly in the mystical way of life. Ordinary mystics live under the habitual guidance chiefly of the five active gifts of the Holy Spirit; while in the extraordinary mystics the other two contemplative gifts are habitually predominant.

According to Jacques Maritain, mystical graces are twofold: they may be predominantly contemplative and then they characterize the strictly contemplative life. This happens when wisdom and understanding are the ruling gifts. Or they are chiefly active, found in active life and in realizing union with God in the very action, as is the case when the other gifts take the lead.⁹

F. Extraordinary mystical prayer, not necessary for the highest holiness

Extraordinary mysticism is not necessary for the highest sanctity; and this for many reasons. 1) Vatican II declares that every Christian by virtue of his baptism is invited to the holiness of Christ and consequently to follow Christ as closely as possible.¹⁰ All Christians, then, are called to the perfection of charity according to the measure of grace given to them. Obviously not all are called to extraordinary mysticism. In point of fact there is no mention of contemplation or mysticism in chapter five of the Constitution on the Church.

9) Jacques Maritain, "Une question sur la vie mystique et la contemplation", *Vie Spirituelle*, 7 (1922) pp. 636-650.

10) *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, Chapter 5.

The conclusion is that Christian perfection does not consist in the quality of prayer, much less in its quantity.

2) Ways such as the Little Way of St. Theresa of Lisieux, are not the way of extraordinary mysticism. Often the Little Way is simply assumed to be identical with extraordinary mysticism of St. Theresa of Avila. But this assumption is ill-founded. This has been proved by Herman-Josef Lauter in an enlightening article.¹¹

It is true that Theresa of Lisieux did experience a few isolated mystical phenomenon – some visions, the spiritual piercing with the flaming dart, a kind of spiritual rapture. But nowhere does she attest to what St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross call “union”. Indeed, such experiences are not consonant with her “little way”. What the “little saint” understands by union is simply and exclusively a childlike and trustworthy submission to God’s will, a union of love in the darkness of faith.

The goal upon which St. Theresa’s every effort is focussed is something entirely different from the mystical marriage. Her mystical experiences are not typical of her way. They remain accidental, a mere by-product unessential to the completeness of the little way. Once she had found her way, the saint instinctively sensed that extraordinary mysticism had no part in it. “Never have I craved for extraordinary favours. This is not part of my little way”. She believed that her “story” would be useful to all souls, “with the exception of those who are following extraordinary ways”.¹²

Few saints followed the way of extraordinary mysticism, if we disregard isolated mystical experiences. Even St. Francis of Sales, the “teacher of perfection”, is no exception. Against the logic of a unified system, experience speaks in favour of the special character of the extraordinary mystical vocation.¹³

11) Herman-Josef Lauter, “High Mysticism and the Little Way”. *Theology Digest*, 9 (1961) pp. 52-53.

12) *Ibid.* p. 53.

13) *Ibid.*

3) As the above quoted author observes, a more objective view of the matter is taken in contemplative convents than in theological centres. Marie de Jesus, the saintly Mother Superior of the Carmelite monastery in Dijon, where Elizabeth of the Trinity also lived, gives the following advice to a young sister: "Either (the spiritual life in Mount Carmel) leads, God willing, to mystical union, or it grows so much in the theological virtues that, the life of faith is transfigured and transformed, and the dawn of vision almost breaks".¹⁴

The Mother Superior of a German Carmelite Convent wrote the following letter in reply to questions: "I am familiar with the passages (of John of the Cross) which you quote, but I believe that the touch of God explained by advanced mystics is now granted to very few people. Not that God has become less generous in His dispensation of grace, or that men have become less susceptible. In our time, God seems to prefer holiness ripened in dark faith and in staunch fidelity, as exemplified by the little St. Theresa, St. Conrad and others. Whether this is really so, I do not know; but I have never met in my whole life a mystic of the type of our predecessors in the Order".¹⁵

4) All are agreed that closeness to God consists exclusively in the love of God and neighbour. So there is no hitch in concluding that extraordinary mystical life is not the normal term of the growth of the supernatural virtues and gifts. It is a special call.

The perfect Christian life is a re-enactment of the life of Christ in us. Christian life can be lived in full vigour without any enlightenment as in the case of extraordinary mysticism. For perfect holiness no one need feel in the depth of his spirit the psychological shock of enlightenment nor even the tranquillity of the prayer of quiet. The true Christian enlightenment comes after death; and even the most profound experience in this world is no more than a pale shadow of the future reality. For this reason, in the long process which precedes the canoniz-

14) *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

15) *Ibid.*, p. 54.

ation of a saint, the Church never asks about the profundity of his enlightenment or the experiences of his prayer, but only about his practice of heroic charity. Traditionally extraordinary mysticism is only valued as an expression of something more important, namely, the charity which is the centre of the gospel message. When this charity expresses itself in extraordinary mysticism, then it is precious. But if a mystical experience is divorced from charity or induced by other means than charity, then it cannot be called a central feature of the Christian life. In other words, extraordinary mysticism as such has never been extolled by Christianity; it is always an expression of charity.¹⁶

To attain the highest development of the Christian life, a person necessarily must enter the mystical state. But this can be the state of ordinary mysticism. One, then, does not have to receive the gift of extraordinary mysticism to attain even the highest holiness. Some authors feel that probably brief touches of extraordinary mysticism will be necessary.¹⁷ But if they are, God on His part will certainly offer them. In such cases the brief experiences of extraordinary mysticism, which easily go unrecognized as such, constitute isolated instances, and do not situate the person receiving them in the state of extraordinary mysticism.

As a consequence, a certain writer correctly exhorts us not to be disheartened if we have never known anything like extraordinary mystical prayer.¹⁸ We need not think we have not lived the consecrated life properly just because we cannot now call ourselves, or be called by competent authority, mystics in the classical sense. And, above all, we need not for a single moment consider ourselves abnormal or subnormal because we have not reached extraordinary mysticism. For it is simply not true that the ascetical life, lived to the utmost, inevitably leads

16) William Johnston, "Defining Mysticism: Suggestions from the Christian Encounter with Zen", *Theological Studies*, 28 (1967) pp. 95-96.

17) Edward Carter, *Prayer is Love*. St. Meinrad, Ind., 1975. p. 50.

18) M. Raymond, "Mystical Life-Mystical Prayer", *Review for Religious*, 8 (1949) pp. 123-129.

to extraordinary mystical prayer. Normally, we cannot be mystics without first having been ascetics. But we may as well be true mystics without ever having known extraordinary mysticism.

We can see persons of equal good will and generosity, in the same environment and under the same director, develop differently. One is seen to reach extraordinary mysticism very rapidly, another very slowly, another not at all. Perfection and extraordinary mysticism are not synonymous. The practical conclusion is to rest satisfied with the native endowment that is ours, to rejoice that God has given us so much and to concentrate on our efforts rather than to be studying their effects. It will do us little good to be continually taking our spiritual temperature, feeling the pulse of our souls and counting our mystical respirations. The truths to be remembered are that we are called to be mystics (not necessarily extraordinary ones), and secondly, that if we advance in grace and tend towards perfection, we shall inevitably enter the mystical life.

Variety is the spice of life, and God the Holy Spirit wills that the mystical life be spicy. Granted that His life is fundamentally one, it remains patently true that it can assume the most varied forms, not only because there are seven gifts, but also because the Holy Spirit, their Initiator, can set them in motion according to His good pleasure and have the same gift shine out differently in different persons. Who cannot distinguish Catherine of Sienna from Teresa of Avila; Teresa of Avila from John of the Cross; John of the Cross from Paul of the Cross; Paul of the Cross from Ignatius of Loyola; Ignatius of Loyola from Francis Xavier; Francis Xavier from Francis of Assisi? — all extraordinary mystics, but each as different from the other as star from star and individual from individual.

If the Holy Spirit should wish our sanctification to assume an extraordinarily mystical character, He will make use principally of the gifts of wisdom and understanding. But should He will that our life be mystical in the ordinary sense and express itself in a mysticism that is predominantly active, e. g., in the perfection of humility, or obedience, or some other religious virtue or in the suffering of trials alone with holy abandonment; or in zeal for souls along with an intense interior life, He will

call upon the active gifts rather than the contemplative; and we will be mystics truly, though not of the extraordinary type.

Evidently these mystics will be prayerful souls. Their prayer will be simple, tender and childlike. But remarkable though they be as persons of prayer, the more remarkable trait about them will be their action. Wisdom and understanding will not be as manifest in their lives as counsel, knowledge, piety, fortitude, or fear of the Lord. Extraordinary mystical prayer is not for all, though ordinary mysticism is.

We are all called to be mystics; but not to be extraordinary mystics. We should not grow disheartened just because our temperament, disposition, and present occupation militate against anything like extraordinary mysticism.

What then is the purpose of extraordinary mystical prayer? Theologians offer at least three purposes.¹⁹ In the first place, to prevent extraordinary mysticism from becoming merely a special luxury in the order of salvation, we must see in it a true charism – a favour granted principally for the common good and the glory of the Church. Extraordinary mysticism is a divine gift of prophetic character. It is a powerful witness of the epiphany of the Son of God, of time invaded by eternity, of rebirth in God and of the beginning of eternal life.

Secondly, extraordinary mysticism has influenced all ages to attract souls to the inner life. As a genuine charism, extraordinary mysticism points beyond the narrow sphere of personal existence.

Thirdly, extraordinary mysticism reveals with deepest insight the divine existence in which God moulds his saints. And what better revelation is there of the unimaginable joys of heaven than the descriptions of the transforming union of the deifying marriage, that immersion of the spirit in the flooding torrents of light and love of the divine life!

19) Herman-Josef Lauter, "High Mysticism and the Little Way", *art. cit*, p. 54.

The vocation to ordinary mysticism and that to extraordinary mysticism are complementary to each other. The extraordinary mystic depends to a greater degree on the ordinary mystics for the translation into action of the fruits of his intercessory contemplation. The ordinary mystic, in his turn, depends on the extraordinary mystic for his intercession as well as for his experience of the transforming union.

G. No distinction between acquired and infused contemplation

The difference between acquired (active) and infused (passive) contemplation cannot be accepted on various grounds. This stand is not something new. E. Lamballe, for instance, who wrote at the beginning of this century convincingly argues against the distinction between acquired and infused contemplation.²⁰

1) The distinction between acquired and infused contemplation was never dreamt of by St. Thomas Aquinas, St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa and St. Francis de Sales. Further, there is no place for it in their system. After methodical prayer of a discursive and affectionate character, St. Teresa ranks those kinds of prayer which she calls supernatural, that is to say, passive: the prayer of recollection and of quiet, of the slumber of the powers, of union, and of ecstacy. St. Francis de Sales prescribes meditation until love is formed in the soul; then love makes souls contemplate, but only when grace is present or under special influence of the Holy Spirit. There is no place here for acquired contemplation. According to St. John of the Cross, for all souls, contemplation is a "loving attention to God" brought about by the influence of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, that is to say, passively.

2) Contemplation is always a passive kind of prayer, at the outset only slightly passive, when God impresses the sense of His presence on the soul momentarily; and then, much more passive, when He unites it to Himself so that it forgets everything else; and still more so, when He attracts it so strongly as to tear it away from its sense perceptions. But in all these cases, contemplation remains substantially the same.

20) E. Lamballe *Mystical Contemplation*, London, 1913, pp. 90-92; 199-203.

3) There is no doubt that the contemplation spoken of by St. Thomas, St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa and St. Francis de Sales is infused contemplation. Father Poulain, who maintains the distinction between acquired and infused contemplation, himself acknowledges that, according to these saints, the word contemplation is only applied to a mystical state which is either latent or manifest.²¹

4) Every prayer is infused in the sense that it is a gift. All of us are already blessed with the contemplative gift, with the seeds, at least, of contemplation. The one given fact of the spiritual life is union with God, and this vital union of human will with the divine Reality is the essence of contemplation. Why mystical prayer is masked in most cases is an unfathomable mystery, since God has His own hidden reasons. It is not certainly due to lack of grace at all. Probably it is at least partially due to natural circumstances, such as the psychological dispositions of the individual and the non-mystical nature of the environment. In other words, it is the supernatural union that is God's free gift. With the right internal and external circumstances and a particular psychological type of prayerful person, the infused contemplation simply becomes the connatural concomitant and manifestation of that union.²²

Basing on the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas, E. Lamballe shows that every contemplation is infused insofar as it is the differing manifestation of the activity of the infused gifts of the Holy Spirit.²³ Every contemplation is the result of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and therefore is not extraordinary as to its being. It may be extraordinary only as to its mode - it is produced by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Theology teaches us that there are several kinds of actual graces. The common doctrine is that one cannot do the least of

21) A. Poulain. *The Graces of Interior Prayer*. *op. cit.*, Ch 4, Section 4.

22) William McNamara, *The Human Adventure*, Garden City, 1976, pp. 21-22.

23) E. Lamballe, *Mystical Contemplation*, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-18.

supernatural works without receiving an actual grace. But these graces sometimes entirely escape our notice. In our determinations and decisions we are fully conscious of what we are aiming at, of the motives we follow, and are hesitating or energetic according to the strength or weakness of the attraction we follow. The extent of the action of the Holy Spirit entirely escapes our consciousness. Apparently God does little more than when He simply assists the exercise of our faculties. These graces are always at our disposal.

But there is another kind of actual grace which is not thus at our disposal, but which takes place in an extraordinary manner. By it we are momentarily given up to divine action; we obey an extrinsic principle, which is God.²⁴ In virtue of this external principle, we receive an increase of strength for the mind and will which makes difficult efforts easier. We may easily infer from the sudden appearance, without any traceable cause, of new dispositions, from the great difference between our present powers and their immediately preceding state that we are helped from on high. Hence some great resolutions, conversions, outbursts of fervour, and steps forward. We have all of us often, in some way or other, been taken by surprise by some sudden enlightenment, by some generous aspiration, when we appeared to be rather passive than active. Such graces as these are necessary, according to St. Thomas, even for the just, if they are to continue persevering, and therefore all the more so, if they are to attain to any eminent sanctity. Those extraordinary motions of the Holy Spirit are, in fact, the kind of graces to which contemplation belongs.

Passive life is an effect of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. St. Thomas and most theologians with him, think that gifts of the Holy Spirit are lasting habits which enable the soul to receive God's impulse more readily. St. Thomas admirably brings out the essential difference between our manner of action under the gifts and our ordinary mode of action by means of virtues. The characteristic of gifts is to produce in us a kind of passive state. By means of virtues we guide ourselves; by gifts we are led.²⁵ In the exercise of the virtues, we reason in a more or

24) ST I-II, q. 68, a. 1. 25) ST II-II, q. 52, a. 2.

less explicit manner, we consider the motives of reason or of faith that appeal to us, and we make our own decisions. With the gifts, there is no need of such slow decision, we follow an impulse, a direct instinct.²⁶ This indeed is an extraordinary state; another works in us from without; our faculties no longer act, as formerly, by our own action or impulse; they are passive. We are the instruments or organs of the Holy Spirit.²⁷ Fundamentally, the act remains supernatural both in virtues and gifts, but the mode of action is different.

The other differences between virtues and gifts are largely corollaries of this essential difference. The first is, that actions done under the influence of gifts are apart from the rules of ordinary prudence, in the sense that ordinary prudence does not intervene in their production and often also in the sense that it cannot explain them because the wisdom of the Holy Spirit is above all ordinary rules. God is not under the same obligations of prudence as are binding upon us owing to the infirmity of our powers.

The second difference is that gifts give rise to acts which virtues are incapable of producing, namely, extraordinary and heroic acts. If virtues cannot produce the same acts as gifts, gifts nonetheless can bring forth the acts of the virtues. It is to be noted that if the virtues cannot bring forth certain acts of the gifts, it is not because such acts possess any other nature but because they are too great to be within the range of virtues. There is no difference in kind between them, but the difference is one in intensity and perfection.²⁸

Mystics are persons who, by abandoning themselves entirely to God, come to the point of feeling as if they were almost altogether passive under His action: they have hardly anything to do except to acquiesce in good impulses.

Acts of mystical prayer are a part of normal spiritual life. Only that these acts indicate a higher external cause, namely,

26) *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 1.

27) *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 3, ad 3

28) *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 2, ad 1

God. When the gift of understanding, for instance, comes into play, it will produce superhuman and passive faith.²⁹ Comprehension and adhesion through God's extraordinary action will then take place. When one believes through virtue, one has in one's mind motives of credibility. We say to ourselves that it is a lawful, good and obligatory thing to believe, and we freely accord our belief with more or less of intensity. The Holy Spirit cooperates, but He is concealed under our activity and is unperceived. In the act of the gift, the work of virtue disappears; we neither weigh nor deliberate, but find ourselves believing, we know not how. There is no room for hesitation; there can only be adhesion and certitude, because it is the Holy Spirit who causes the act and He is not the cause of any of its defects.

And thus it is with love. This enables us to understand the kind of blind propensity towards God of which mystics so often speak. The motive of love or of understanding have never been brought into play, at least in the human manner, but the soul loves because the Holy Spirit enkindles love in it. Therefore there is no such thing as acquired contemplation, for mystical contemplation is nothing else than passive and superhuman faith and love which are the effects of the infused gifts.

5) The highest mystical prayer is nothing but the highest sanctity. There is the historical fact that apart from the martyrs not a single saint has been canonized by the Church unless he were also a great mystic. All the great saints are great mystics. Furthermore, if their inner history be closely studied, it will be found that they first of all passed through the lower degrees of contemplation to rise step by step as their virtue increased. The lives of saints prove therefore that the state of a soul's interior prayer corresponds with its degree of virtue. St. John of the Cross has formulated the rule: "Mystical union is very slowly fulfilled by insensible degrees and in proportion as the soul grows in perfection.... It is determined by one's spiritual progress".³⁰

6) The relationship between psychological and ontological mysticism seems to go against the existence of acquired contem-

29) *ST* II-II, q. 8, a. 6.

30) *Spiritual Canticle*, Stanza, xxiii

plation. Ontological or objective mysticism is the basis of psychological mysticism.³¹ Ontological mysticism is God's self-communication to us in Christ. It is the mystery of Christ. It is God's concrete plan of redemption in Christ.

Baptism, initiating us into the mystery of Christ, makes ontological mysticism personally present to each one of us. In this sense we are all mystics. Psychological mysticism is subjective mysticism. It is the subject's more or less habitual and experiential awareness of what it means to be alive in Christ. Psychological mysticism is a constant and experiential awareness of ontological mysticism.

Felix Podimattam

31) Edward Carter, *Prayer is Love*, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-43.

Book-Review

Cyprian Illickamury, O.F.M. Cap., *The Lordship of Jesus Christ over the World and the Church. The Christological Witness of the Pastoral Constitution "Gaudium et Spes"* (ATC Publications, Bangalore).

Fr. Cyprian Illickamury, O.F.M. Cap., is the Professor of Systematic Theology at St. Joseph's Theological College, Kotagiri, Nilgiris Dt. The present work is his doctoral thesis, accepted by the Catholic Theological Faculty of the University of Münster, West Germany, in 1977.

The title of the book itself shows that it is a topic of great interest for the renewal of Christian faith and life today especially in view of doubts and uncertainties and crisis. Renewal of Christian faith and life can take place only by going back to the very source and centre of Christian faith, namely the person of Jesus Christ himself.

The theme is of great ecumenical interest. In the ecumenical sphere it has been one of the most discussed topic of reflection and study since the Churches are aware that the ultimate norm of all unity is the lordship of Jesus Christ. The author has approached the theme with an open mind and shows no confessional prejudices in the development of the treatise. Christians of all denominations would feel themselves addressed in the book.

The book is a critical study of the theme of the lordship of Jesus Christ, as it comes to expression in the Pastoral Constitution "*Gaudium et Spes*" of Vatican II. But it is not merely an exposition of the Christological teaching of Vatican II. The elaborate first part that precedes the examination of the Pastoral Constitution presents to us the Christology of the New Testament in a quite scholarly way. It is solidly based on the findings of present-day exegetical scholarship. While examining and evaluating the Christology of *Gaudium et Spes*, the author

presents the lordship of Christ in a way understandable and acceptable to the man of today. But he does so, not by watering down, but by penetrating into the central content of the mystery Christ. This mystery itself, namely the life, death and resurrection of Christ is shown to be the basis of the lordship of Jesus Christ over the world and the Church.

Christology cannot rest satisfied with abstract speculations about the person of Jesus Christ, about his nature, divinity and so on. Christological reflections will be sterile unless they lead to a radical following of Christ in the concrete tasks of daily life. Christological reflections here do not remain simply in the speculative level, but they have quite serious practical consequences for the day to day life of the Christians, be it in the familial, social or ecclesial level.

Vatican II understood itself not as an end but as a beginning. That is true also of its Christological reflections, especially as they come to expression in *Gaudium et Spes*. Christology, even as theology in general, is not static but dynamic. It is an on-going process of reflection in faith and life in commitment. And that is what prompts the author to set the task of new reflection and new practice for the post-Vatican Church. On this task, according to the author, depends to a great extent the authentic carrying out of the mission entrusted by Christ to the Church.

Thus, this study is a great contribution to theology in general and Christology in particular. It has a very definite message for all those who are in any way concerned about the renewal of Christian faith and life today. While presenting this scholarly work to the theological public, I sincerely congratulate the author for his great achievement and scholarship in Christology. His is a work which is bound to be a point of departure for a more profound and relevant understanding of our faith and life in Jesus Christ. Fr. Illickamury deserves our sincere appreciation for the significant contribution he has made to the theological literature in India.

Stephen Jairaj

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